

Setswana Grammar Manual

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Introduction

This grammar manual is meant to be a guide in terms of information. It is assumed that you will take the initiative by working hard in language class and practicing with your host family (where possible) and LCF. Much of language learning in Peace Corps will be self-motivated, therefore the onus is on you the volunteer to get the most out of training. This manual will hopefully help. It is meant to complement the other resources you receive at the beginning of PST. At minimum you should have a Setswana-English dictionary, the blue and white *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* book and daily language worksheets supplied by your LCF. Many of the topics covered in the Beginning section here are also covered in the “First Steps” book and the worksheets. For this reason only examples are given here, not exercises. Page references to other materials are given where applicable. The Advanced section contains topics beyond what is necessary for training and what most other grammar books cover. For a full list of Setswana resources, see the Appendices.

In your language class you will be given approximately 10 new vocabulary words per day on top of what you are learning day-to-day. It is in your best interest to learn these words as quickly as possible. In 6 weeks you will have accumulated 300 daily vocab words and however many you can in the particular niches (home, school, work, etc). The standard vocabulary benchmark for fluency is 5000 words, so this is meant to give you a decent base to continue learning at site. If you make the effort you will be fine.

My recommendation is that you practice making as many sentences as possible during your time with your instructor in as many tenses as possible. If you are currently doing “food” in language try saying “I eat food” with and without objects, in the past/present/future tense, with locatives, with auxiliary verbs, using pronouns, adjectives and adverbs, change the verb extension so the actions switch (eg: the food is being eaten), etc. Pronunciation takes a lot of practice, especially with unfamiliar sounds that don’t exist in English. Fortunately Setswana lacks most of the “click” sounds that make isiXhosa, isiZulu and siSwati so difficult for non-native speakers.

There are a lot of possibilities and this is the best time to try them out. Just reading through the handouts once won’t really help. Your instructors will have ideas and games, but a lot of the language sessions will be guided by you. Take the initiative to form pairs/small groups and ask questions in different tenses, using different words, etc. This is definitely a self-directed learning environment.

Try to get the most out of it while you're in a group, have the time, and have a teacher.

You need to be aware of the challenges faced by your language instructor. The qualification process is fairly involved, and Peace Corps does try its best to get good instructors, but they are still a native speaker trying to teach their mother tongue. It's often very difficult to teach your own language, especially if you are not formally trained. Your LCFs are products of the same education system as the teachers and NGO managers you will be working with at site, so bear with them. As has been said before, a lot of this will be self-directed with your language trainer being a facilitator.

Your host family for training may or may not speak your target language. It could be that it is not their first language but that they still understand it/can help you with it. Ask. Peace Corps tries to pick training sites that accommodate the languages being trained, but with eight and counting this is not always possible. Still many people across the country will have some knowledge of a Sotho-based language, so it's worth a try.

Lots of people use lots of methods for learning vocabulary. I know flash cards work really well for some people and others can just repeat a word in their head. Still others (like me) need a real context in order to successfully retain new vocabulary. Find what works for you. If you don't know or want to learn different techniques, pick up a copy of the Self-study Language Book from the Peace Corps IRC. It's full of good ideas and tips for learning languages. It's also worth investing the time to ask other volunteers what works for them. Many come from different backgrounds and have different methods for acquiring new information. Learning a language need not be tedious and boring (unless that's what works best for you). And don't be afraid to suggest new ideas and techniques to your LCF. They're part of the learning process too.

You will not be fluent by the end of PST (nor will you be expected to be). First your vocabulary won't be all there and secondly your grammar will only be about 50% of what full fluency requires. That's ok. Two people with imperfect language skills can still have a meaningful conversation. Hopefully by the end of PST you'll have reached "foreigner-fluency," which is still more than most foreigners and even many South Africans achieve in a Bantu language. So even when you "vomit the dishes" or "cook your grandmother" people will still understand what you are saying. I get more complements on my language and my horse than I do on the library I'm building. You'll also hear a lot more than you can speak, and you'll have a solid base to increase your grammar and vocab skills.

There is a Language Proficiency Evaluation at the end of PST, which is given orally by someone other than your language instructor. This is not an exam, although you will receive a level of fluency (ranging from Novice to Advanced). This has no real bearing on your site placement or your status as a volunteer. Peace Corps would like everyone to rate at least Intermediate Low after PST, but you don't "fail" if you get below that. It is just a measure of your progress during training, and is used so we know how people are performing overall so we can make adjustments for the next group to improve language.

Good luck, and please give us lots of constructive feedback as to how language training at PST can be improved/changed.

Long may we fight the good fight,
Art Chambers (Tshepo Dioka) SA 16
PC Language Committee (unofficial)

POSTSCRIPT: Art is long gone, and I've taken on the task of revising this grammar manual, mainly by formatting it up nice. I'm afraid I can't hold a candle to his Setswana chops, so you won't be hearing much from me. What comments I do make will be indicated by three asterisks (). You will, however, enjoy the bomber typesetting of L^AT_EX. If you don't know what that is, well, Donald Knuth would be happy to tell you if you can find an error in *The Art of Computer Programming*.

One thing I am noticing while formatting this beast is that a great deal of very useful grammar is buried deep in Chapters 5 and 6, particularly section 6.20. One you get your Setswana legs, it's worth at least going through the table of contents to see if there are any formulations you might not know you were missing.

Lastly, feel free to email me with any comments or concerns.

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Chapter 1

Some Tedious But Necessary Groundwork

1.1 Grammar Glossary

This section gives a brief explanation of some grammar terms used in this and other Setswana references. Sometimes the names used in dictionaries and other grammar manuals do not correspond to the ones listed here, but we have tried to use the most common names. This is adapted from the siSwati Grammar Handbook and meant to help you remember some of those concepts you may not have used since high school English. The names and definitions are not always exact but should suffice for the purposes here. We hope it helps.

Absolute (Emphatic) pronoun - a pronoun that can stand in the place of the subject or object noun. It is used to show contrast and/or emphasis.

Active Voice - sentences where the subject performs the action. “I hit her” is in the active voice. Compare with the Passive Voice.

Adjective - a word that describes or modifies a noun. Fat, big, large, and massive are all adjectives.

Adverb - a word that describes or modifies a verb. Slowly, happily, sadly, and well are all adverbs.

Agent - the noun that carries out the action of the verb on another noun, if the conjugated verb could reference either (This is normally dependent on the order of nouns before the predicate, common with some Setswana verbal extensions).

Article - a word that is used with a noun that specifies whether the noun is definite or indefinite. The and a are articles. Setswana and all other Bantu languages do not have them.

Copula - non-verbal predicate, e.g. “it is” also expresses “to be” with nouns (it is a non-verbal form). In Setswana many adjective clauses are copula forms as well as the indication of presence or availability. The copula form is also included with many verbs where “to be” would normally be used in English

since “to be” doesn’t really exist in Setswana

Clause - a part of a sentence. There are different kinds of clauses including dependent clauses, infinitive clauses, and adjectival and adverbial clauses.

Colloquialism - a word or phrase used more in informal conversation than in formal speech or writing.

Concord (Linking Pronoun) - when a noun prefix stands alone, it is called the concord. Concords are used in numerous ways: with nouns, as pronouns and demonstratives, with possessives and adjectives. Just about any time you use a noun in a sentence you must also use its concord. Concords can also represent the subject and object in the predicate. They link the subject to the verb and are a staple of Bantu languages. The individual concord is not actually a word, is necessary to construct sentences and conjugate verbs.

Conditional Mood - used to describe something that will be done or will happen only if and when another thing is done or happens; something that expresses a condition or limitation: something tentative or dependent on something else

Continuous Tense - sentences that have things happening “now.” Verbs in this tense have the suffix “-ing.” This is also called the progressive tense.

Declarative Sentences - make a statement and end in a period (full stop). They declare something.

Demonstrative (Relative) Pronoun - a pronoun such as this or that. They show specificity (this one and that one) as well as distance from the speaker (this one here and that one over there). English has only 2 levels of distance (near and far) while Setswana has 4 (near, near us, far, and that there yonder).

Dependent Clauses - a clause that shows the dependency of one part of a sentence to another. These clauses start with words like when, if, and whether. In this sentence “When the bell rings the school will close,” “when the bell rings” is the dependent clause.

Diminutive - a suffix that indicates small size, like -ito in Spanish

Direct Object - the word or phrase in a sentence that indicates somebody or something directly affected by the action of the verb, such as “cat” in “She fed the cat.” The thing which is acted upon by the verb,

Elision - the omission of a vowel, consonant or syllable while pronouncing or writing something as a natural shortening, like a contraction (He’s vs. He is)

Enclitic - a non-word that is added to a complete word for emphasis or to add subtle meaning... né

Ennumeratives - tells how many there are, gives the number of things.

Formative - any non-word which, when added to a verb stem or full word, changes the meaning (like verb & noun extensions).

Future Tense - refers to the time that will come

Habitual Mood - used to describe something that is done regularly or frequently

Hortative Mood - not quite a command, but more demanding than simply asking. It urges, encourages, or strongly advises someone to do something

Idiom/Idiomatic - a word or phrase that has a specific meaning in context that is different from the literal translation e.g. “When pigs fly.”

Imperfect - a form of the past tense that denotes a given action was in progress in the past. It is also used for states of being in the past.

Imperative Mood - gives a command such as “come here.” The word “you” is not used in these sentences but is “understood”; i.e. “(You) come here.”

Indirect Object - the recipient of the action shown by a verb and its direct object, for example, “the cat” in “She gave the cat a meal.” A person or thing affected by the action of the verb but not primarily acted upon.

Infinitive Clauses - a part of a sentence that begins with the word “to.” In the sentence “I want to run away,” “to run away” is the infinitive clause.

Infinitive Verb - a verb expressed in its basic form, it does not tell a tense. “Run” is an infinite verb; “ran” is a finite verb.

Intransitive Verb - a verb without a direct object, for example the verb to die in the sentence “He was slowly dying.” Certain Setswana verbs need an extension before being able to accept direct objects.

Interrogative Sentences - ask a question.

Locative - a form of a noun that shows position. For instance, *ntlo* means house, but *ntlong* means at home (the place of the house). Locatives are used to translate places in Setswana (but not their proper names).

Moods - are forms of a verb indicating whether it expresses a fact, command, wish, etc. These are not tenses (they do not indicate time) but still involve conjugation e.g. imperative mood, subjunctive mood, conditional mood, etc.

Noun Class - Bantu languages organize their nouns into different groups (also sometimes called genders). For example almost all people nouns belong in class 1. There are several different ways to organize noun classes. The format presented in this manual is similar to the ones in most other Setswana reference books, incorporating the most commonly used classes. It works for us. If you like a different way, do it that way. See the Noun Class Master for more.

Object Pronoun - a pronoun that stands in for the object noun, such as him, her, and them.

Optative Mood - a form of the Subjunctive mood that expresses a wish or desire, as does the independent clause “God save the Queen”

Participial - a word formed from a concord and used as a verb or adjective. It carries a meaning similar to -ing in English and is used to describe things.

Passive Voice - sentences where the subject receives the action being performed. In the sentence “She was hit by me,” “she” is the subject and is receiving the beating. In passive sentences, the agent performing the action usually follows the word “by.”

Past Tense - refers to the time before now.

Perfect Mood - refers to the state of the verb. A verb in the perfect tense expresses a completed action. Verbs in this tense end with “ed” (licked) unless it is a special case or irregular verb (ran) and use an auxiliary verb (has, have, had).

Personal Linking Pronoun (Modified Concord) - a form of the concord usually formed by adding “a” to the end (*ke = ka*). They are used in certain grammar constructions in Setswana and are similar in form to the possessive pronouns.

Phoneme - a “piece” of sound in the make-up of a word.

Possessive Pronoun - a word that shows that one object or person “has” or “owns” another person or object. His, her, and there are examples of possessive pronouns. In Setswana, forms of concords are used to denote possession.

Potential Mood - used to express the possibility or likelihood of something occurring, happening, doing or becoming in the future

Preposition - words such as at, on, over, and under. These words describe the location of one object relative to another. In the sentence “The book is on the table,” “on” describes the position of the book relative to the table.

Present Tense - refers to the now.

Progressive Construct - used to express continuous action

Pronouns - words that stand in the place of a noun. There are a lot of different kinds of pronouns, including object, demonstrative, adjective, and subject pronouns.

Reflexive - referring back to the subject of the sentence. Taking a reflexive pronoun as an object, thereby indicating an action that the subject does to or for itself

Relative Clause - a clause that modifies a noun. In the sentence, “The child who is fat ate all the cake,” “who is fat” is the relative clause. These are sometimes called adjective clauses because they describe the noun. In English a relative clause is usually set off by a relative pronoun (or adjective pronoun) such as whomever, who, or that.

Subjunctive - expresses an action or state as a visualized event and not as a reality. It also expresses doubts, wishes and imaginings. In English “were” is often used, as in “I wish I were taller” or “should” as in “We should get going now.”

Strong Adjectives - adjectives which are capable of standing on their own and need no prefix attachment. These are the same as Relative clauses.

Subject Pronoun - a pronoun that stands in the place of the subject noun, such as he, she, or they.

Syntax - how a sentence is put together, a.k.a. its sequence.

Transitive Verb - a verb needing or usually taking a direct object. Certain verbs in Setswana need an extension before being able to take on a personal direct object.

Verb Extensions - suffixes which are attached to the verb stem and alter its meaning. For example adding *-isa* to *reka* (to buy) changes it to *rekisa* (to sell).

Verb Stem - verbs are often the roots of nouns in Setswana. For example from *go ruta* (to teach or instruct) we can derive *moruti* (minister) and *moruta-bana* (teacher/educator). Thus *ruta* without *go* is referred to as the verb stem because that is where all the other words are derived. Extensions can be placed on the end of this stem as well which alter the meaning of the original word.

Weak Adjectives - adjectives in Setswana which cannot stand alone and need a connector and a prefix to make them agree with the noun that they modify.

1.2 Concepts for Ongoing Language Learning

There are a few items that need to be addressed to help with an understanding of the language (in depth explanations will follow throughout PST).

1. The smallest part of speech is not a word, it is the Concord.
2. Concorde are needed to connect nouns to verbs. Nouns are categorized into groups called classes. Most of these classes have singular and plural forms and represent a general group of nouns (though not exclusively so). Each class has its own concord with singular and plural.
3. The verb is conjugated for each mood and tense only once for all persons and nouns, singular and plural.
4. Verbs have a basic meaning which can be altered by a series of extensions (which modify the action performed by the verb) and concords (representing the subject and/or the object)
 - (a) Ex: reka is the verb “buy”
 - (b) Go reka has the concord added (go) to make the predicate “to buy”
 - (c) Go rekisa has the verb extension -isa added to make “to cause to buy” which is usually translated as “to sell”
5. Nouns are composed of 2 parts, a prefix and a root. The prefix changes when for the singular and plural forms, depending on the class of the noun.
6. Setswana is a tonal language. The pitch of a given syllable can denote multiple meanings for the same word. Ex: mabele (low toned - sorghum) and mabele (high toned - human breasts).
7. There are no articles on Setswana (a/the). Definite articles are added to the English translations for ease of understanding.
8. There is often no direct translation.
9. It will be worthwhile to talk to the trainees and trainers who speak Sepedi and Sesotho as well if you have grammatical questions. In all likelihood the trainers will understand Setswana, and the grammar is very similar across all Sotho-based languages.
10. Just as a disclaimer, my site is in the Northern Cape where we speak a version of Setswana called Setlharo. I’ve tried to provide grammar and examples from the most widely spoken dialects in South Africa, but every

place is a little bit different so don't get too frustrated if what you learn here isn't exactly the same as how they speak at training or site. Viva dialects viva.

1.3 Pronunciation and Orthography

Every language has its own sounds. Before we throw you into learning phrases, vocab, grammar and all that, we want you to have a little introduction to the new sounds you will be hearing and hopefully making soon. I'd suggest listening to the examples and trying to make them on your own. If you have a recorder, record yourself and listen to yourself compared to our sounds and see how close you are. Don't stress out if you can't make some of the sounds or can't hear the differences. It takes some time for ears and tongues to learn new tricks. But please don't give up on trying to master these sounds, even if it may take a year or more. I've found myself in situations where either because I was distracted or just tired, my attention to pronunciation dropped and all of a sudden, people who could understand me perfectly were giving me blank stares. Practice with small kids, babies, or a sympathetic native speaker; sure they may laugh but you can laugh with them and they love to make noises with you. For more information on this, see p. 7 of the *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* book.

1.3.1 Vowels

Listen to the pronunciation guide for each vowel, try to pronounce them on your own during the pauses, and repeat until you are satisfied.

a - bala, sala - like 'a' in father - Practice words: bala, sala, ralala, halala, mala

e - lela - like 'a' in lay or came - Practice words: lela, lema, leba, sele, eletsa

ê - êma - like first 'e' in there - Practice words: sêla, wêla, fêla, êma, êlêlêla

i - bina, ina, bitsa - like 'ee' in deep, but shorter - Practice words: hira, dira, sibi, bina, ina, bitsa

o - moruti, motse, bogolo - like 'o' in boat - Practice words: bola, koma, lorolê, moruti, motse, bogolo

o - pelo, podi - like 'u' in put

ô - bôna - like 'ou' in bought - Practice words: bôna, fôla, sônô, mabôgô, ôbamologa

u - utswa, legodu, utlwela, pula - like 'u' in rude - Practice words: turu, kubu, leburu, pula, pududu

ee, aa, oo - double vowels elongate the original vowel sound - Practice: reetsa, maatla, Loopeng ("raetsa", "mahtla", "Loepeng")

au - tau, ausi - like 'ou' in ouch

oi - boitumelo, boboi, - like 'oy' in boy

oa - Tsiloane, o a reng - like w, usually followed by 'a'

Listening drills are advised. Try adding the accents to the word after listening to a native speaker read the words listed here

*Based on Botswana Language Packet, *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p.7

NB: Just like in English, there are some pretty big variations in pronunciation and accents. For the most part we'll try to give you the kind of Setswana generally heard in most of the Northwest Province. We'll try to include footnotes for variations we know of. Forgive us if we don't cover the accents they use at your site. Add them as notes to the language sheets and submit it to the Language Committee to include in future editions!

1.3.2 Consonants

Things that sound the same: b, ch, d, f*, h, j, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, w, y

Non-existent - q, v, z

š - sh

g - gape, goga, - like the sound you make when hawking a lougie or the sound you make when gargling (think the Yiddish "H")

ph - phola, phutha, phuthega - like the 'p' in peach, a 'p' with aspiration - practice words: phala, phaka, phafana - Contrast: pala, pabi padisa

kh - Practice words: khea, khaba, khai - Contrasts: kala, kapa, kima

th - thusa, thuto, batho - like the 't' in take, a 't' with aspiration - practice: thaya, thapa, thari - contrast: tima, tita, tinta

tl - tlala, tla - like the 'cl' in cluck

tlh** - tlhapa, tlhatswa - like the 'cl' in sclerosis, 'cl' with aspiration - practice: tlhaba, tlhapa, tlhpha - contrast: tla, tletse, tliša

ts - potso, tsamaya - like the 'ts' in pots, don't be intimidated by it showing up at the beginning and middle of words

tsh** - tsholofelo, tshaba - like 'ts' in pots with aspiration - practice: tshaba, tshela, tshola - contrast: tsala, tsetse, tsina

x - nxe, Nxau-nxau - a palatal click that is laterally released - this is fairly uncommon in Setswana so don't stress about the clicks

ng - ngaka, - like 'ng' in wrong, swallow the 'n'

-ng - lengole, maungo - like 'ng' in wrong - note with a preceding 'n' the 'g' is more like the English 'g' (in some archaic texts, the ng is written as ñ, eg. tshimologoñ)

Nasals:

N, nn, m, mm, ny - Practice: Nna, ntlu, nnete, mma, mphê, mme, nyala, nyêlêla, lenyôra, ngala, longole, ngôngôrêga

***c** - Coe, Mocumi, Macwiri - archaic Setswana, has largely been replaced with 'ts' but is found in some proper names still, pronounced like 'ch' in church

** the whole "with aspiration" bit is often difficult and sometimes impossible to hear. Try to make the difference and listen to the tapes to try to hear the difference but in general, you will need to use the context to figure out meaning. For example, *tsela* 'road' and *tshela* 'serve' are hard to mix up when taken in context.

Note: **s, ts, f** - in some places the local accent will alter the pronunciation of these letters. S may be pronounced like sh, ts like ch and f like h.

Sometimes these will be combined with other consonants in constructions you wouldn't find in English. The sounds are just like adding the sounds together into one sound. For example: *kg* in *kgosi*, *nk* in *nku*, *tlw* in *utlwa*, *tshw* in *tshwara*, *tsw* in *utswa*, *ngw* in *ngwana*

NB: many people leave off the accents in written Setswana so be sure to check with your LCF or in your dictionary to figure out the correct accents. It will help in learning pronunciation even if you never use them when writing Setswana.

1.4 Body Language

Over 70% of communication is non-verbal, so it would make sense to start here before getting into the actual spoken language. Personal space is much diminished in Africa in general, so get used to that. When greeting, it is important to shake hands with both men and women. As a sign of respect, when greeting elders or co-workers it is polite to always use your right hand and touch your left hand to your right elbow (your LCF will demonstrate how). A slight bow is also appreciated. The same procedure (without the bow) is repeated whenever you receive something from someone. If for some reason your right hand is soiled but you need to greet, offer your right forearm instead. Not your left hand. This will be shaken just like a hand.

In conversations people will often hold hands, regardless of gender. This can often go on for several minutes. In most cases it's perfectly normal and not uncommon to see (black) people amiably walking down the street hand in hand. It has nothing to do with sexual orientation. You are not obligated to hold hands with someone while conversing however, and a simple tug should be enough to disengage. If you feel your palm being scratched while you hold hands, this person is trying to come on to you.

Some other non-contact physical vocabulary includes:

- placing the thumb in between the index and middle finger means I would like to have sex with you
- pointing both thumbs towards the mouth in an up-and-down motion means eating
- the thumbs up means OK
- pointing your index finger up means you want a longer distance taxi
- pointing your index finger down means you want a local taxi
- hitting your open palm with a closed fist means that the vehicle you are in is full
- rotating your index finger in a circle means you are coming back around
- rubbing your chin with your hand indicates a man

- touching your chest once where each breast would be indicates a woman

Now learn some language so you don't look like an idiot all the time.

Chapter 2

Baby Steps

2.1 Greetings

Table 2.1: Diverse Setswana greetings.

Setswana	English
Dumela / Dumelang	Hello (sing. / plural)
Agee (response)	And to you too
O/Le kae?	How are you? (sing. /plural)
Ke/Re teng.	I'm fine (sing. /plural)
O/Le tsogile jang?	How have you risen?
Ke/Re tsogile sentle.	I've risen well.
O/Le robetse jang?	How did you sleep?
Ke/Re robetse sentle.	I slept well.
O/Le tlhotse jang?	How was your day?
Ke/Re tlhotse sentle.	I spent my day well.
Ga go na molato.	There're no worries.
Molato ga o yo.	No worries here.
Wa reng?	What's up?
Ga ke re sepe/ Ga ke bue	Nothing
Go ntse jang?	What's it like?
Go ntse jalo/Go siame	It's like that

The first thing you will want to be able to do in Setswana is to greet people in their home language. It's hard to overestimate the importance of greeting in Tswana culture (and African culture in general). People will be very happy when you greet them in Setswana. They will be very angry if you don't. This applies even if you don't know that person personally. Table 2.1 shows most of the common greeting procedures.

Dumela always comes first. The response is either just to repeat *dumela* or say *agee*. It can be followed up by any other question phrase. The most traditional is *Le kae?*, to which the response is *Re teng*.

The proper answers to the other questions are given in the table. Don't worry about learning all of them now. Just a few will go a long way. It is considered extra polite to use the plural form of the greeting (le), especially for elders. For grammar's sake, the answer should also be in the plural form (re) but this is not absolutely necessary. In reality, any answer above is acceptable for any question. A person may ask, "*O robetse jang?*" and someone may respond "*Ke tsogile sentle.*"

In the Northern Cape (and maybe elsewhere), this formal greeting maybe eschewed in favour of the more informal *Ga go na molato* of which the response is to repeat *Ga go na molato* or say *Molato ga o yo* (which is essentially the same thing). *Wareng* is also a standard greeting and usable with adults and adolescents (and even gogos). *Bo sele* is used in the mornings after *Dumela*. When in doubt, just repeat.

Some other greetings you may encounter in the Tsotsitaal vernacular:

Eta = Yo

Eta hola = Yo yo

Go jwang? = What's up

Ke moja = I'm ok

Ke pashasha = I'm alright

Ke shap (or just "shap") = I'm fine

Since greetings are associated with respect, it is important to try and greet people in a way that shows the most respect. It can get kind of tricky so just roll with the mistakes but in general remember age trumps gender but after age, male trumps female (it's a patriarchal society, after all) So you'd greet *nkoko*, then the father, then the mother, then the children. Ask the locals for further details. None of this applies to young men or drunk people. You are under no obligation to greet them, especially if they are around a tavern. In fact it's best to give such types a wide berth.

Table 2.2 shows leave-taking procedure.

2.2 Survival Sayings

Table 2.3 gives just a few words and phrases you may want to know before you dive headfirst into learning Setswana. They will come in handy even if you don't understand the grammar or the exact meaning of every word.

Setswana has a moderate vocabulary when compared to English but contains many different dialects. During training you will be given 10 words a day to learn. By the end you will have mastered a level of Setswana necessary for day to day interactions both at home and work. You are not expected to become

Table 2.2: Diverse Setswana Goodbyes

Setswana	English
Go siame	Good bye
Tsamaya sentle	Go well
Sala sentle	Stay well
Ke tla go bona	See you
Robala sentle	Sleep well
Tlholo sentle	Have a good day

Table 2.3: Survival Setswana

Setswana	English
Ke a leboga	Thank you
Leina la me ke	My name is
Sefane same ke	My last name is
Ke(insert name)	I am (insert name/job)
Wena o mang?	Who are you?
Ke mang yo?	Who is that person?
Ke tswa	I am from
O tswa kae?	Where are you from?
Ke moithaopi	I am a volunteer
Nthusa!	Help me!
Legodu!	Thief!
Ke bokae?	How much does this cost?
Ke batla	I want
Ke kopa	I would like
Ga ke na madi	I don't have money
Toilete e kae?	Where is the toilet?
Ke kopa toilet roll	I would like toilet paper

fluent in 8 weeks. Also because of the dialectical differences in Setswana, some of the things you learn in training may not “translate” to your site. Don’t worry, this can be annoying but it need not be devastating. With this in mind then, the most important question in Setswana is:

Ke eng selo se?

If you say “*Ke eng selo se?*” and point at something someone will tell you the name of that something. It is translated as “What is this thing?” Ask and point. Repeat until fluent. If you want to ask how to say something in English without having to point at it, try

(Insert word) e raya eng ka Sekgoa? = (Insert word) means what in English?

Replace *Sekgoa* with *Setswana* to do the reverse. You are now equipped to visit Sun City. For the rest of South Africa, see below.

2.3 Nouns and Verbs

In Setswana, the most basic and important step to learning the language is to understand the structure of nouns. You must know the different noun classes even before you can begin to construct simple sentences. Be sure to take the time to feel comfortable with noun classes at the beginning, as you will build on this knowledge throughout PST and beyond.

2.3.1 Structure of the Noun

In Setswana all nouns are comprised of two parts:

1. A prefix
2. A root

For example, consider at the noun

BOGOBE = Stiff porridge (pap)

In this noun, the prefix is BO- and the root is -GOBE. In most cases the prefix will be the first 2 letters; a consonant followed by a vowel (ex: Bo-). In some words though, there is no prefix:

NKU = Sheep (singular)

In this noun the whole NKU is the root (Notice in this example that there is no vowel after the N-, that’s your clue). These words are all of a certain type and will be important later.

2.3.2 Structure of a Verb

Each verb in Setswana consists of stem, onto which prefixes (unattached) and suffixes (attached) can be added which alter the original meaning.

Reka = buy

By adding the prefix *go* we make the infinitive form of the verb:

Go reka = To buy

By adding the suffix *-isa* we can make the causative form of the verb:

Go rekisa = To cause to buy (to sell)

By adding the suffix *-ela* we can make the equivalent of the English for:

Go rekela = To buy (something) for someone

For more on this, see the “Verb Extensions” section.

By attaching the prefix *mo-* and changing the ending to *-i* we derive the noun form

Morekisi = seller (one who sells)

The concord is essentially another prefix that can be added to the verb to connect it to the subject of the sentence, which is performing the action. This is discussed next.

2.4 Noun Classes

Now that you understand the basic structure of the noun, we can look at noun classes. Basically, all nouns are grouped into classes according to their prefix. Each class consists of a singular and a plural form. Remember that in Setswana when we pluralize a noun, instead of changing the ending of the word like in English (ex: hand hands), we change the prefix of the word (ex: seatla diatla). For simplicity sake, nouns are broken up into 7 different classes. Table 2.4 lays out the goods.

Now let’s look at a few examples:

Mosadi = Woman (singular)

Prefix : **Mo-**

Basadi = Women (plural)

Prefix: **Ba-**

Now according to Table 2.4, both these nouns fall into class 1, the Mo/Ba class, which incidentally includes most of the nouns having to do with people. So if you see the word

Table 2.4: Noun classes in Setswana.

Noun Class	Prefix (sing.)	Prefix (plu.)	Category
1	Mo-	Ba/Bo-	People
2	Mo-	Me-	
3	Le-	Ma-	Fruits & Foreigners
4	Se-	Di-	
5	No prefix	Di-	Animals & Things
6	Lo-	Di-	
7	Bo-	Ma-	

Monna = Man

You can form the plural just by changing the *Mo-* prefix to *Ba-* to make:

Banna = Men

Above we learned that some nouns don't have a prefix (like *nku*). These are mostly animals and borrowed words from other languages (borrowed words, incidentally, are very common). So for them we just add the plural prefix to the beginning:

Nku = sheep (singular)

Dinku = sheep (plural)

(If you ever feel like Setswana is ridiculously complicated remember that unlike most nouns, "sheep" is both plural and singular in English - not so simple either.)

Try to familiarize yourself with each noun class. It is not important that you memorize each specific number (they are used for reference only and vary slightly with different publications), but you should be able to take a singular noun and know its plural form and vice versa.

Remember that the structure of Setswana language is very different from the structure of English so if you're asking yourself how any of this applies to learning the language, be patient. Very soon it will all start snapping into place. Either that, or you'll have a psychotic episode.

2.5 Concords

Simple sentences in Setswana are very similar to English. In basic Setswana, the word order follows that in English exactly:

Ke ya ko tropong = I go to town

O ja dijo = You eat food

Ba bala dibuka = They read books

This works fine with pronouns, but with regular nouns Setswana throws a curve. It's called a **concord**.

Ntšwa e rota ko bodilong = The dog pees on the floor

Remember there are no articles in Setswana (the, a, etc), so just ignore them. The only thing that doesn't fit in then is that stray *e*. That *e* connects *dog* to *pees* and is necessary for the sentence to make sense in Setswana. But that *e* is not the same for all nouns. It's a concord. Every noun has a concord, and every sentence uses concords to connect the noun to the verb, so it is important to be familiar with them.

Now recall what we learned about the different noun classes in Table 2.4. Each noun class has its own concord for singular and plural forms, shown in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5: Noun classes and concords.

Class	Example Noun		Prefix		Concord	
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.
1	monna	banna	mo-	ba-	o	ba
2	motse	metse	mo-	me-	o	e
3	leina	maina	le-	ma-	le	a
4	setilo	ditilo	se-	di-	se	di
5	kgosi	dikgosi	–	di-	e	di
6	loleme	dileme	lo-	di-	lo	di
7	bogobe	magobe	bo-	ma-	bo	a

This prefix of the noun is also the same as the concord...

Dikgomo di ja bojang = The cows eat grass

Setilo se a robega= The chair breaks

Batho ba nwa bojalwa = People drink beer

Bogobe bo a fisa

...in all but four cases. The three categories of nouns beginning with m- are exceptions. With these nouns, the concord is formed by using whatever vowel comes after the m-.

Monna o nwa bojalwa = The man drinks beer

Motse o na le ditsela = The village has roads

Metshameko e monate = Sports are fun

Mafika a thata = Rocks are hard

Boloko o maswe = A lot of cow dung is disgusting

The n^* class also doesn't quite follow the rule about prefixes. This is a special noun class for singular words don't have any special prefix attached to them. It's a catch-all class. Basically any words in Setswana that don't start with any of the other prefixes fall into this class and use *e* as their concord. This is also where all the borrowed words from other languages fit in.

Thipa *e* sega borotho = The knife cuts bread

Kolobe *e* rata dijo = The pig like food

Kgosi *e* a tsamaya = The chief goes away

All you have to do is make sure that the subject pronoun has its corresponding concord, and you're set. Singular and plural work the same way as above.

Motho *o* tshameka bolo = The person plays soccer

Batho *ba* tshameka bolo = The people play soccer

This is one of the most important parts about the Setswana language. If you learn nothing else about grammar, learn how this works. Even when you make mistakes with the nouns and concords, people will still be able to understand what you're saying (and Batswana sometimes make mistakes as well). But if you continue to study Setswana you will keep running into these things, so get to know them now. For more, see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*, p. 13.

2.6 Personal Pronouns

Most of your initial conversations in Setswana will probably revolve around yourself. You have needs and thoughts and ideas that you want to express, so those are probably what you will learn to say first. But as to not be so self-centered, you may also want to talk about other people. Therefore it is important to introduce personal pronouns early on. Also this will help you when you begin to construct simple sentences. Table 2.6 shows all of the personal pronouns.

Table 2.6: Pronouns in Setswana.

English	Pronoun	Concord
I	Nna	Ke
You	Wena	O
He/She	Yona (Ene)	O
We	Rona	Re
You all	Lona	Le/Lo
Them	Bona	Ba

For example, if we want to say "I like school,"

The pronoun (or subject noun) is: *Nna* = I

The concord is: *ke*

The verb is: *rata* = like

The object noun is *sekolo* = school

So we can say:

Nna ke rata sekolo

But in normal conversation, most people omit the actual pronoun and say:

Ke rata sekolo

The *Nna* is implied from the concord *ke*. Similarly if we want to say, “We see the cow” we could say:

Rona re bona kgomo

Or we can just say:

Re bona kgomo

Either way is fine.

2.7 Simple Sentences in the Present Tense

You’ve already encountered the basic elements of Setswana: the nouns, concords and verbs. Before we start making sentences, though, you should be aware that every sentence in Setswana has a positive and a negative form. In English we add *no* or *not* to a positive sentence to make a negative one. In Setswana it varies with the type of sentence you want to construct.

2.7.1 Commands

The most basic form of communication in Setswana is the command. It consists of one word, the verb stem. We’ll start with the positive version.

Verb stem + !

Here are some examples.

Tsena! = Come in! (if someone is at your door)

Tla! = Come! (if you just want someone to come over)

To do this properly, you must memorize some vocabulary. This works for any verb, but Table 2.7 gives a list of some simple ones to start.

To tell someone not to do something, simply add *se* to the beginning of your command and change the verb ending to *e*:

Table 2.7: Commands in Setswana.

Setswana	English
Dula!	Sit!
Ema!	Stand!
Taboga!	Run!
Bona!	Look!
Bula!	Open!
Tswala!	Close!
Suta!	Move away!
Tsaya!	Take!
Thusa!	Help!

Se + verb (ending in e) + !

Here are a couple examples.

Se je! = O seka wa ja! = Don't eat

Se tsamaye! = O seka wa tsamaya = Don't walk

This first construction is actually the negative subjunctive form. For more on it, see the Subjunctive section or *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 37. It is how most people will speak commands.

Another way to tell someone not to do something is just to add the personal pronoun concord, the word *seka* and the verb stem together:

Concord + seka + verb stem

Before we learned how to tell someone to come in if they are at your door (tsena). Maybe you don't want them to come in. To tell them that you say:

O seka wa tsena = Don't come in

Though they probably will anyway. If you really want to keep people out, lock your door. More examples:

Le seka bona = Don't look (all of you) O seka taboga = Don't run (you)

The way shown above is the contracted, simplified version of the proper Setswana way of commanding. To learn the true grammatical command, see the Imperative section.

This works for commands only, viz. things you want to tell other people to do or not to do. You cannot command yourself to do something. (Fetch!) In the next lesson we will learn how to say that you are doing something, or not doing something.

2.7.2 Positive Present Tense

In technical terms, there are two forms of simple, present tense, positive sentences. To illustrate this, let's look at two sentences:

1. Monna o ja bogobe = The man is eating pap
2. Monna o a ja = The man is eating

What is the difference between the two? Both have the noun, concord, and verb like the sentences above. The difference is that in sentence 1 there is an object noun (*bogobe*) after the verb. In sentence 2 the verb is the last word.

In Setswana when a sentence ends with a verb you must put the letter *a* directly in front of the verb, to prop it up. Technically, sentence 1 is called the “dependent” (short) form, and sentence 2 is called the “independent” (long) form. If it helps, remember that the second sentence is independent of an object noun. It can stand alone.

To simplify things, let's say that you always write a sentence in the following way:

Subject noun + concord + verb + object noun

However if you do not have an object noun after the verb, the sentence will be written in the format:

Subject noun + concord + a + verb

- Monna o *a* apaya = The man is cooking (or “The man cooks”)
 Nna ke apaya bogobe = I am cooking bogobe (or “I cook bogobe”)
 Barutabana ba *a* ruta = The teachers are teaching (or “The teachers teach”)
 Thipa e *a* sega = The knife cuts (or “The knife is cutting”)

Some people may get confused as to whether adding the *a* is representative of an action taking place at that very moment. Some people may also think that the *a* is indicative of something happening now (the Present Continuous tense) and therefore try to put the *a* in any time something is happening presently. This is not the case. For example if you want to say “I am eating pap (now)” you still write “*Ke ja bogobe*” not “*Ke a ja bogobe*.” When I say “*Ke ja bogobe*” it can either mean that I am eating pap at this very moment, or that I do, generally, eat pap. The exact definition will be determined by the situation in which it is said and any adverbs of time used (or the Habitual mood). For more on this see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* pps. 13 & 45.

Some books may add to the confusion. The construction “noun + concord + a + verb” is sometimes translated as -ing because it generally indicates an action that is in process. (Example: “*Ke a ja*” is “I am eating”. If you said “*Ke ja bogobe*” you’d be too busy talking to chew.) As stated above though, don’t take it literally to mean “now”.

2.7.3 Negative Present Tense

This is when you want to say that you are not, or do not, do something.

I am not running = Ga ke taboge

They do not eat chicken feet = Ga ba je “runaways” (menoto)

You don’t know = Ga o itse

These are some examples of negative, simple, present tense sentences. When you write these sentences in Setswana, the following structure applies:

Subject noun + ga + concord + verb (ending in -e) + object noun

Here’s how it works. We always put the word *ga* to the left of the concord, and the last letter of the verb always changes to *-e*. For example, the verb *see* is *bona*. In the negative form, it changes to *bone*. In the positive sentences we just learned, you put *a* to the left of the verb if there is no object. In the negative sentences, you never put *a* if there is no object noun. Look at the example sentence:

Positive form: Ke a apaya (I cook)

Negative form: (Nna) ga ke apaye

When talking about the third person singular (he/she), we normally use the concord *o*:

Thabo o ja bogobe

However in the negative form, that concord changes to *a*:

Thabo ga *a* je bogobe

This *a* is different from the *a* we learned about in the previous lesson. It is actually the participial for he/she, but don’t worry too much about that at this point. Just keep practicing the form until you get a feel for what sounds right.

That’s a lot for one section, but don’t get overwhelmed just yet. (There will be plenty of time for that later.) Once you begin to practice the negative sentences, they really become quite easy.

Chapter 3

Testing the Waters

3.1 More Than One Verb

Now that you are writing simple sentences in both positive and negative forms, let's try to make more complex sentences using more than one verb. To begin, let's look at the simple sentence:

Ke ithuta = I am learning

But what are you learning? Are you learning to write, to read, to speak? Maybe you want to tell someone that you are learning to speak Setswana, "I am learning *to speak Setswana*." Notice this sentence has two verbs, learning and speak. In Setswana we can say:

Subject noun + concord + verb #1 + go + verb #2 + object

So to translate our previous sentence:

Ke ithuta go bua Setswana = I am learning to speak Setswana

Notice the *go* in between the verbs. Remember that by adding the prefix *go* to the verb we make the infinitive. So *go bua* means to speak. We add this after the first verb just like we do in English. Here are a few more examples:

Ke batla go apaya dijo = I want to cook food

Ke rata go bala = I like to read

Ba leka go bua Setswana = They are trying to speak Setswana

Re batla go bona kgomo = We want to see the cow

Ke rata go ja nama = I like to eat meat

It works the same way with the negative. When you say a more complex sentence in the negative form, you simply say the first part of the sentence in the negative way we just learned, then add the rest as you normally would in a positive sentence.

Subject noun + ga + concord + verb #1(-e) + go + verb #2 + object

Here are some examples:

Ga ke batle go apaya dijo = I don't want to cook

Ga ke rate go bala = I don't like to read

Ga ba leke go bua Setswana = They aren't trying to learn Setswana

Ga re batle go bona kgomo = We don't want to see the cow

Ga ke rate go ja nama = I don't like to eat meat

As a cultural note, it is important to remember that in South Africa it is generally impolite to refuse anything. While you should by no means feel obligated to do something that you really do not want to do (or feel unsafe doing), people may get offended upon hearing that you don't want or like to do or (usually) eat certain things. Such refusals will usually necessitate a long and possibly creative explanation as to why you do not like something. Most times such a conversation will suffice alone. Just as we are learning more about other people and their culture, South Africans will be learning about us and our culture.

3.2 Interrogatives

To ask questions in Setswana, you need to do either one of two things.

1. To make any normal sentence a question, add *A* to the beginning

O bua sekgoa = You speak English

A o bua sekgoa? = Do you speak English

O rata Afrika Borwa = He likes South Africa

A o rata Afrika Borwa? = Does he like South Africa?

2. You can use a question word in a sentence. If you do this, you don't need to add the *A* at the beginning.

O dira eng? = What are you doing?

Sekolo se fetsa ka nako mang? = At what time does school end?

3. Sometimes you can form a question just by stating a regular declarative sentence, but changing your tone of voice to indicate your confusion or lack of knowledge. Hand and arm motions work well too.

Table 3.1 shows the most common question words. All question word go right after the verb, except *goreng* & *ke eng* (which go at the beginning of the sentence). To think of it another way, turn the question into a statement and replace the answer with the appropriate question word.

For example: What are you eating?

Who	mang	When	leng
What	eng	How	jang
Where	kae	At what time	ka nako mang
Why	goreng/ke eng	Which	-fe

Table 3.1: Common Setswana question words.

You are eating (pap) = O ja bogobe

You are eating (what) = O ja eng?

To say *which*, just add the concord as a prefix to *-fe*.

Ditilo dife? = Which chairs?

Lebati lefe = Which door

3.3 Simple Future Tense

Once you have mastered the present tense sentences in the positive form, learning the future tense is quite easy. Let's look at an example using the sentence:

I cook pap = Ke apaya bogobe

Now to change this to the future tense in English we add *will* and in Setswana we add *tla* in exactly the same place:

I will cook pap = Ke tla apaya bogobe

So anytime you want to say a positive sentence in the future tense, you simply add *tla* before the verb:

O tla bala ka moso = You will read tomorrow

Ke tla boa = I will return

Re tla bona = We will see

Note that you do not need to add the *a* in sentences where there is no object present. Just using *tla* will suffice.

3.4 Future Negative Tense

This one is not so easy. It is important to note that there are several different ways to form the future negative tense. The two most common are presented here, but be aware that the ones you learn in training may not be the ones they use at your permanent site.

Look at the following sentence:

O ka se ye toropong = You will not go to town

Note the following things:

- *Ka se* is added after the concord
- The verb ending changes from *a* to *e* (just like in the present tense negative sentences)
- A note on concords:
 - The third person singular (he/she) changes from *o* to *a*
 - The first person singular becomes *nka se* instead of *ke ka se*
 - The rest of the concords stay the same

The formula is:

Subject + concord (participial) + ka se + verb

Here are some examples.

Mpho a ka se bone Thabo ka moso = Mpho will not see Thabo tomorrow

Nka se taboge = I will not run

Re ka se reke disweets = We will not buy sweets

Le ka se ithute maths ka satertaga = Y'all won't study maths on Saturday

Mastering the future negative might take a little work, but once you practice enough you will be able to use it without thinking. So take the time now to write a lot of sentences, then start to practice with people. It will get easier, but if you don't actively try to learn this technique, you will forget it very quickly. Practice makes perfect.

The most other most common way to say something in the future negative tense (this is used most often in the Northern Cape) is by using the negative marker *ga* followed by the future marker formed with the concord and *kitla*, plus the concord (participial) again and the verb stem.

Ga + concord + kitla + concord (participial) + verb stem

For example:

Ga nkitla ke reka = I will not buy

Ga o kitla o bereka = You will not work

Ga o kitla a thusa = He won't help

Note that in the first person singular, instead of *ke kitla* it becomes *nkitla* as a shortened form (this happens a lot with *ke*). Also note that in the third person singular the *o* changes to *a*. When this happens, it is called the participial. It's just like the concord, except for the "he/she" form. Everything else works as normal.

Please check with your community to see which way is used most often. For more on this see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 28.

3.5 Positive Past Tense

The past tense is very similar to the present tense, with the exception that the verb ending changes to signify that the event happened in the time before now. Sometimes it is also called the “Perfect Tense” (see First Steps p. 49).

Let’s look at the following sentence in the present tense:

Ke tshameka bolo = I play soccer

To express this in the past we (usually) simply change the ending of the verb from *-a* to *-ile*.

Ke tshamekile bolo = I played soccer

So the general formula is:

Subject + concord + verb-ile + object

For example:

Ke dirile sengwe = I did something O berekile thata = You worked
a lot Ba batlile dijo = They have wanted food

The “exact” translation of this tense into English is have + past participial but many times people will just render it in the simple past in English. The difference only becomes important when you get to the Advanced section.

Also, not all verbs end in *-ile*. Actually, there are a number of different endings in the past tense. The simplest way is just to memorize the past tense form when you learn a new word. If you want to take a look at some formulas for making the past tense, see the Past Tense Conversion section. There is a chart of frequently used verbs with their past tense forms in the Appendix.

3.5.1 States of Emotion

When we talk about our emotions in Setswana (happy, sad, tired, angry, etc) we always say them in the past tense no matter what time we are actually talking about. For example, the word for tired is *lapa*. But to express the idea that someone is tired (even now), you would use the past tense *lapile*:

Ke lapile = I am tired

Think of it as “I became tired.” When you are tired, you’ve already passed the moment that you became tired. In the same way, if someone is sleeping we say “*O robetse*” instead of saying “*O a robala*” because he/she “became asleep” in the past. Table 3.2 gives some more examples in this vein.

English	Setswana
Bored	Boregile
Sad	Hutsafetse
Angry	Ngadile
Annoyed	Tenegile
Tired	Lapile
Sleeping	Robetse
Awake	Tsogile
Broken	Robegile

Table 3.2: States of emotion.

3.6 Negative Past Tense

There are a few different ways to say things in the negative past. We'll start with the easiest and most common one first. Learn that one. Then, if when you get to site they use a different form, look for it in the Past Tense Conversion section.

The simplest form follows the format:

Ga + concord (participial) + a + verb-a + object noun

For example:

Ga ke a dira sepe = I didn't do anything

Ga wa ya toropong = You didn't go to town

Ga ba tsamaya = They didn't leave

(Editor's Note: Art wrote the last two examples as *o a* instead of *wa* and *ba a* instead of *ba*; the changes were made based on input from native Setswana speakers, your LCFs. My suspicion is that the shorter versions are the pronounced contractions which elide the difficult-to-pronounce multiple consonants.)

Notice that the ending of the verb doesn't change. We just add *ga* at the beginning and a like normal in the Long Present. For the third person singular, *o* → *a*.

Ga a reka dijo = They didn't buy food

For more on this, see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 49.

An alternative way to make the simple negative past tense is to add *sa* between the concord and the verb

Le sa fetsa tiro ya gae = You all didn't finish your homework

This is actually a contracted form of the Negative Past Continuous Tense, but you don't need to know that yet.

Chapter 4

Now We're Getting Somewhere

4.1 Locatives

Now that you can talk about your comings and goings, it's time that you learn how to say where you're coming from and going to in this ocean of chaos. (Some of us might have to pretend like we can answer those questions.) You may have already noticed that in Setswana when you're talking about a specific place, you don't just say the place name. You need to add something else, and it's called a locative.

Ke tswa shopong = I am from the shop

Ke ya sekolong = I am going to school

O mo ntlong = She is in the house

You will notice that all these sentences have object nouns which are places (*shopo*, *sekolo*, *ntlo*). But each one has something extra added on the end. This *-ng* is the locative suffix and is used almost any time that an action is happening related to a specific place. Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + verb + place -ng

For example:

O ile morakeng = He went to the cattle post

O ko motseng = She is in the village

Dipodi di siile ko sakeng = The goats escaped from the kraal

In addition to the *-ng* ending, you will also see words like *mo*, *ko*, *fa*, and *kwa* used to express locations.

English	Setswana
My	me*
Your	gago
His/her	gagwe
Our	rona
You-all's	lona
Their	bone

Table 4.1: Personal Possessives.

- *Fa* implies relative closeness (has the meaning of at, to, from)
- *Ko* indicates relative distance (also has the meaning of at, to, from)
- *Kwa* indicates extreme distance (has the meaning far away, there yonder)
- *Mo* indicates that something happens in, into, out of, on, or around an area without reference to distance

For more on this see Locatives in the Advanced chapter. Note that this does not usually apply to proper place names.

4.2 Personal Possessives

When we talk about something that belongs to us or someone else, we need to be able to distinguish the owner. For example you might want to introduce someone as “my friend” or say that this is “our school” or “their car.” As you might have guessed, the way we do this changes with each noun class.

To try to simplify things, let's begin by looking at the trends to show possession. We'll look at the noun classes next. If something is first person singular (my/mine), the possession always ends in *-me* regardless of the noun class. For example:

Tsala ya me = My friend

Ditsala tsa me = My friends

Similiary, there is a specific ending to each group: my, your, his/her, you-all's, and their. Table 4.1 has the goods.

So, for example

Morutabana wa gagwe = His teacher

Don't worry about the wa part yet, we will come to that next. However, you should recognize the gagwe as referring to the third person singular or “his/her.” Some more examples:

Morutabana wa rona = Our teacher

Morutabana wa bone = Their teacher

So now that we know how the possession ends, let's look at the connecting prefix, which is determined by noun class. Table 4.2 shows the connecting possessive prefixes for each noun class. Here's a rough formula:

Concord + a = possessive (same as modified concord)

Table 4.2: More possessives.

NC	Prefix		Possession Prefix	
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.
1	Mo	Ba	wa	ba
2	Mo	Me	wa	ya
3	Le	Ma	la	a
4	Se	Di	sa	tša
5	N	Di	ya	tša
6	Lo	Di	lwa	tša
7	Bo	Ma	bo	a

You can see from Table 4.2 that noun class 1 always begins with *wa* regardless of who or what is possessing it. So to make a possessive in Setswana you must know two things, first who is doing the possessing and second what class is the noun being possessed. Some more examples:

Setilo sa gago = Your chair

Setilo sa gagwe = His chair

Dijo tša bone = Their food

Borukgwe ba me = My pants

Leina la me = My name

* In deep Setswana, the *-me* is actually *-ka*. Some people will say it this way, and it is the “proper” grammatical way, but most often you will probably hear it as *-me*.

For more on this, see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 73.

4.3 Numbers

Batswana really only use numbers in Setswana up to about 10. After that (or sometimes before) they use English numbers because the Setswana versions get progressively more unwieldy. However it's good to know how to form them just in case.

A quick perusal of Table 4.3 should make the formula fairly obvious. For example:

Table 4.3: Numbers in Setswana.

1	Nngwe	11	Lesomenngwe	30	Masomamararo
2	Pedi	12	Lesomepedi	40	Masomamanne
3	Tharo	13	Lesometharo	50	Masomamatlhano
4	Nne	14	Lesomenne	60	Masomamarataro
5	Tlhano	15	Lesometlhano	70	Masomamasupa
6	Thataro	16	Lesomethataro	80	Masomamarobedi
7	Supa	17	Lesomesupa	90	Masomamarobongwe
8	Robedi	18	Lesomerobedi	100	Lekgolo
9	Robongwe	19	Lesomerobongwe	1000	Sekete
10	Lesome	20	Masomamabedi	Million	Mileone

Masomamabedipedi = 22

Masomamabedirobongwe = 29

Again, as the numbers get bigger, the Setswana words get preposterously large, which is why people usually just use the English. And remember that with the British system, it's a decimal comma (0,5) and a point to separate thousands (1.000), not the other way around, though the American system does appear on occasion.

Table 4.4: Some more useful numerical terminology.

1st	Ntlha (Mo/Fa pele)	Once	Gangwe
2nd	Bobedi	Twice	Gabedi
3rd	Boraro	Thrice	Gararo
4th	Bonne	Four times	Ganne
5th	Botlhano	Five times	Gatlhano
6th	Borataro	Six times	Garataro
7th	Bosupa	Seven times	Gasupa
8th	Borobedi	Eight times	Garobedi
9th	Borobongwe	Nine times	Garobongwe
10th	Bolesome	Ten times	Galesome

You should be able to see the pattern in Table 4.4 easily as well. Add the prefix *bo-* to the ordinal number to make 1st, 2nd, etc. Add *ga* to the ordinal number to make once, twice, etc.

4.4 Adjectives

In Setswana there are two different types of adjectives. The first kind are a lot like adjectives in English and are called “Relative” or “Strong” adjectives. The second kind need some help to stand on their own and are thus called “Weak” adjectives.

4.4.1 Strong Adjectives

These adjectives are basically nouns that can be used to describe something. In a very simple sentence, you can describe something just by saying what it is:

Subject + concord + Strong adjective

For example:

Kgosi e molemo = The chief is good

Moruti o bonolo = The minister is polite

Setilo se thata = The chair is hard

To say what something is not, just add the negative marker *ga* before the concord:

Subject + ga + concord + Strong adjective

For example:

Kgosi ga e molemo = The chief is not good

Moruti ga o bonolo = The minister is not polite

Setilo ga se thata = The chair is not hard

To talk about something in general, use the infinitive *go*:

Go + Strong adjective

For example:

Go thata = It's hard

Go mogote = It's hot

Go tsididi = It's cold

To talk about something that is “not” in general, add the negative marker *ga*:

Ga + go + Strong adjective

For example:

Ga go thata = It's not hard

Ga go mogote = It's not hot

Ga go tsididi = It's not cold

But to really use an adjective properly, you need to know how to use it to modify a noun in a regular sentence. To do this you need a little something extra in addition to the concord, called a **demonstrative pronoun**. We'll get to what exactly that is later, for now it's just sufficient to know that each noun class has its own and learn what they are. Table 4.5 shows the connectors for strong adjectives by noun class.

Table 4.5: These words are necessary to use strong adjectives.

Noun Class	Singular	Plural
1	yo o	ba ba
2	o o	e e
3	le le	a a
4	se se	tse di
5	e e	tse di
6	lo lo	tse di
7	bo bo	a a

You'll notice that most of the connectors above are simply the concord repeated twice. The only two differences are the first noun class singular (*yo o*) and classes 4, 5, and 6 plural (*tse di*). So to form the connector, always put the demonstrative pronoun first, followed by the concord, which is the same in all but two cases. These connectors serve to connect the noun to the adjective (as you might have guessed). In Setswana, we say the object being described first, then the adjective. Here's a formula:

Noun + connector (Demonstrative + concord) + Strong adjective

For example:

Mosadi yo o bothale = The wise woman

Setilo se se thata = The hard chair

Dikgosi tse di bonolo = The polite chiefs

Not too bad, ne? Just bad enough. It's up to you to learn more adjectives in training, whether from your LCF, language packets, dictionary, host family, etc. To make it easier for you, remember that strong adjectives are also nouns. For more on this, see the Advanced chapters.

4.4.2 Weak Adjectives

I prefer to call these “humble” adjectives but in most books they are referred to as weak adjectives or sometimes just as adjectives. Just like with the strong adjectives, we say the object first, then the adjective.

Mosadi yo motelele = The tall woman

There are a few things to notice here:

- First, there aren’t 2 words connecting the noun to the adjective, only 1 (in this case yo)
- The word for tall is *-telele* (or *-leele*). But note the prefix *mo-*. The prefix to the adjective is the same as the prefix for the noun.

So, the “rules” for writing Weak adjectives are:

- Each phrase has a “connector” which is determined by the class of the noun (similarly to the strong adjectives)
- The prefix for the adjective is the same as the prefix of the noun
- Except when the prefix is *n-*, then we don’t use a prefix

Table 4.6 shows each noun class with its connector and prefix.

Table 4.6: Weak adjectives in all their glory.

NC	Prefix		Concord		Prefix to Adj.		Example
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	
1	mo	ba	o (yo)	ba-	mo	ba	Mosadi yo motelele
2	mo	me	o	e	mo	me	Molomo o montso
3	le	ma	le	a	le	ma	Lebati le letelele
4	se	di	s	tse	se	di	Setlhako se sentle
5	–	di	e	tse	–	di	Nku e nnyane
6	lo	di	lo	tse	lo	di	Loleme lo lotelele
7	bo	ma	bo	a	bo	ma	Bogobe bo botshweu

Notice that in class 5 there is no prefix to the adjective. Notice also that the connectors here are the same ones as for the Strong adjectives. The formula for making Weak adjectives is similar to that for making Strong adjectives too:

Noun + connector + prefix + adjective

For example:

Sekolo se setona = Big school
 Batho ba bantsi = Many people
 Monna yo montle = Handsome man
 Gempe e tala = Blue shirt
 Ditilo tse dinnye = Small chairs

To form the adjectives, you first identify from which noun class is the word that you are modifying (by means of its prefix). You then choose the corresponding connector (which in all but 2 cases is the same as the prefix). You then add the same prefix the noun uses to the beginning of the adjective to complete the sentence. For example:

Loleme - Noun class 6, prefix *lo-*
 Connector is *lo*
 Prefix is also *lo-*

So then it's *lo- lo lo-*:

Loleme lo lotelele = Long tongue

This is also how we talk about numbers in sentences. We treat the number as an adjective stem.

Noun + connector + prefix + number

For example:

Marotho a matlhano = Five breads (loaves of bread)
 Batho ba babedi = Two people
 Diforoko tse nne = Four forks

Notice that with numbers, we don't write the prefix *di* for Noun Classes 4, 5, and 6. Also note that *p* changes to *b* for the number two. This may seem like a complicated process just to describe something, but remember that in all but 2 cases everything is the same as the prefix to the noun you are describing. This, along with the concord, has the added effect of making Setswana a very alliterative language. Whole sentences will be made up of words that all share the same first two letters. So when in doubt, just go with what sounds right. For more on all this, see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*, pp. 59 & 67.

4.5 Pronouns and Demonstratives

Personal pronouns have been discussed previously. The pronouns mentioned here are different ways to substitute a noun with *it* or *them*. Demonstratives are used to identify certain things as *this*, *that*, or *that over yonder*.

When we are talking about something a lot (eg: food) there comes a point when we want to stop saying the word food and simply say *it*. In Setswana, there are two ways to do this.

1. In this case, we simply substitute a pronoun (determined of course by the noun class) for the word. We call these pronouns Absolute or Emphatic pronouns because they are usually used to emphasize or draw attention to something. For example:

Ke bula lebatl = I open the door

I can simply substitute *lebatl* with the proper pronoun from class 3 singular, *lone*, giving us:

Ke bula lone = I open it (the door)

Table 4.7 shows the absolute pronouns for each class.

Table 4.7: Absolute pronouns dissected.

NC	Prefix		Concord		Example
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	
1	mo	ba	ene	bone	Ke itse ene
2	mo	me	one	yone	Ke dula mo one
3	le	ma	lone	one	Ke bula lone
4	se	di	sone	tsone	Ke rekile sone
5	–	di	yone	tsone	Ke buile le yone
6	lo	di	lone	tsone	Ke agile lone
7	bo	ma	bone	one	Ke ja bone

So the basic formula would be:

Subject + concord + verb + Absolute pronoun

2. In the second way to make pronouns, we just use the concord of the object to stand in for *it*. However, in this method, we put the *it* to the left of the verb. Look at the sentence:

Ke rata dikgomo = I like the cows

If, for whatever reason, you can't seem to stop talking about your love of cows, you may want just want to say, "I like them."

So, as we said before, the *it* concord is simply the concord for *dikgomo*, or *di*. Remember that we put *di* to the left of the verb, *rata*.

Ke a di rata = I like them (the cows)

Remember that when making simple sentences, if there is nothing following the verb, you must add a to the right of the concord. That rule applies to all sentences you make, except when using adverbs of time which will be discussed later.

So the basic formula is:

me	n-*
you	go-*
him/her	mo-*
we	re
you-all	le
them	ba

Table 4.8: Reflexive prefixes.

Subject + concord + object concord + verb

For example:

Ke a ba ruta = I teach them (children)

O a di bolaya = You kill them (bugs)

Ke e rekile ko tropong = I bought it in town (chicken)

4.6 Reflexives

Now that we know how to use concords as object pronouns, we can easily make reflexive sentences.

So if you want to say, “I know you-all,” you can simply use the same format as above, but instead of suing concords from noun classes you will be using the concords for persons

Ke a le itse = I know you-all

Some of the concords will change a little bit when you are using a reflexive sentence. We will discuss the *exceptions next. Table 4.8 has the prefixes laid out.

4.6.1 First Person Singular

When we say something like, “Don’t touch me!” you might think we would say:

O se ka wa ke kgoma = Don’t you I touch

But not exactly. When we are using me as the reflexive, you will use the *n*-form as the first person singular pronoun, attaching it as a prefix to the verb. So you will therefore say:

O se ka wa nkgoma = Don’t touch me

It’s like difference between I and me. Basically, whenever you say something with me, you will put the *n*- in front of the verb. Of course, there are some exceptions to this. You will learn more of them as you go. For example:

O a mpona = You see me

I trust you will be able to construct some general rules from Table 4.9.

Normal Verb	Verb + <i>me</i>	English
itse	nkitse	know me
botsa	mpotsa	ask me
utlwa	nkutlwa	hear me
gapeletsa	nkgapeletsa	force me
hira	nkhira	rent me
leka	nteka	try me
dumela	ntumela	believe me
rata	nthata	like me
sega	ntshega	cut me
palama	mpalama	ride me
fologa	mphologa	dismount me
naya	nnaya	give me

Table 4.9: Additional reflexive irregularities, chosen entirely at random.

4.6.2 Second Person Singular

When you want to say something like “I love you,” you would might think we write it like

Ke a o rata = I you love

However, instead of using the concord *o* we use *go*. So the sentence should read:

Ke a go rata = I love you

This does not change depending on the verb. There are no exceptions.

4.6.3 Third Person Singular

In this case, we use *mo* instead of *o* to differentiate between second and third person singular. So to say “I know him” we write:

Ke a mo itse = I know him

Many times in spoken Setswana, people will contract this sentence to

Ke a mwitse = I know him

For some words, however, the contraction is written down, such as *bona*

Ke a mo bona = Ke a mmona = I see him

Other than that, reflexives are not so difficult. For a list of exceptions, see chapters 5 and 6.

4.7 Demonstratives

Demonstratives demonstrate something, in this case relative location. We already learned how to say it or them in place of a noun. But what if we want to point at something out there and say “This cow” or “That cow” or “That cow (way over there)?” That’s where demonstratives come in.

To say “Do you see this cow?” (if there are many cows and you only want to point out one specific cow) you simply say:

A o bona kgomo e? = Do you see this cow?

To say, “Do you see that cow” you say:

A o bona kgomo eo? = Do you see that cow

And to point at a cow that’s very far away, you say:

A o bona kgomo ele? = Do you see that cow over yonder?

When we say the that over there (ele), make sure to draw out the eeeeeeele to make it sound like it’s far away. Now, as you have probably guessed by now, each noun class has a different way of saying each demonstrative. Table 4.10 shows the *this*, *that*, and *that over yonder* for each noun class.

Table 4.10: Demonstratives demonstrated.

Class	This		That		That Yonder	
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.
1	yo/o	ba	yoo	bao	yole	bale
2	o	e	oo	eo	ole	ele
3	le	a	leo	ao	lele	ale
4	se	tse	seo	tseo	sele	tsele
5	e	tse	eo	tseo	ele	tsele
6	lo	tse	loo	tseo	lole	tsele
7	bo	a	boo	ao	bole	ale

All of these use the same connectors we saw for the adjectives, plus an attached suffix to denote distance. Here’s the formula:

This = connector only

That = connector + o

That over there = connector + le

Practice these and you’ll be fine. For more, see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*, p. 54

4.8 Potential Mood

The Potential mood is used to express the possibility or likelihood of something occurring, happening, doing or becoming in the future; it is also used to express the ability to do something (the potentiality). In English we use “might” or “can.” Some prescriptivists out there might be popping blood vessels in their corneas at such loose grammar; if so, you can drag “may” out from under the Bishop Lowth’s corpse.

Moving on. *Go kgona* is another way to express ability. For more on this see Other Verb Forms. The position and use in sentences of the Potential is similar to the Simple Future (*tla*).

Subject + concord + ka + verb

For example:

Ke ka reka borotho gompieno = I might buy bread today

O ka simolola go apaya = You can start to cook

Basadi ba ka ya tropong kamoso = The women might go to town tomorrow

Nka palama pitse = I can ride a horse

Note that *ke ka* can also be expressed as *nka*. The Potential can also be used to indicate politeness in the form of a question:

A + concord + potential + verb

For example:

A nka go thusa? = Can I help you?

The negative can be formed several different ways. A common one is:

Subject + participial + ka + se + verb (ending in e)

For example:

Nka se reke borotho gompieno = I cannot buy bread today

O ka se simolole go apaya = You cannot start to cook

Basadi ba ka se ya toropong kamoso = The women can’t go to town tomorrow

Nka se palame tonki = I may not ride a donkey

This is used as the future negative tense in some regions. One alternative:

Subject + concord + palelwa + go + verb

For example:

Ke palelwa go dira tiro yame = I can't do my work (I fail to do my work)

O palelwa go tsamaya ko toropong gompiano = You can't go to town today

This literally means to fail. It can also be used with future tense to form something like won't. Yet another alternative:

Subject + concord + ka + seka + modified concord + verb

Examples:

O ka seka wa reka = You may not buy

Le ka seka lwa fisa dibuka = You all might not burn the books

Nka seke ka tsamaya = I won't leave

In some instances *seka* changes to *seke*. This is where one form of the negative Imperative mood is derived from, omitting the initial *ka*:

Subject + concord + seka + modified concord + verb

Example:

O seka wa tima TV = Don't turn off the TV

Lo seka lwa fisa dibuka = Don't burn the books

Frequently in speech the modified concord is dropped and *seka* is shortened to *ska*:

O ska tima TV = Don't turn off the TV

Lo ska fisa dibuka = Don't burn the books

For more on this see the Imperative section or *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*, p. 29.

4.9 Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words used to connect two things together (words, clauses, etc). Some common conjunctions in Setswana are given in Table 4.11.

In the Sentence Construction section we already talked about when to use *le* and *mme*. *Fela* is also frequently used in the same way as *mme*:

Ke batla go ja bogobe fela ga ke itse go bo apaya = I want to eat bogobe but I don't know how to cook it

O na le dikgomo fela ga o na tshelete = He has cows but not cash

Ke a mmita fela ga a nkutlwe = I am calling him but he doesn't hear me

le	and	gore	that
fela	but	fa/ha/ga	if
mme	however	kgotsa	or
ka jalo	therefore	e bile	also, furthermore
ka jaana	since	kana	whether, or
ka gore	because	gape	also, again
ka ntlha	because		

Table 4.11: Setswana conjunctions.

When using *fela* the first clause takes the long present form because it is followed by a conjunction, not an object

Ga ke ye sekolong ka gore ke a lwala = I didn't go to school because I'm sick

Ga go na dijo ka gore ga ka apaya = There's no food because I didn't cook

O tagilwe ka gore o nwele bojalwa = You're drunk because you drank beer.

Also like *fela*, you must use the long present unless your verb takes an object regardless of how much sentence comes after it.

Ke a lwala, ka jalo ga ke ye sekolong = I am sick, therefore I don't go to school

Ga ke a apaya, ka jalo ga go na dijo = I didn't cook therefore there is no food

O nwele bojalwa, ka jalo o tagilwe = You drank beer, therefore you're drunk

Ka jalo is the reverse of *ka gore* so we can just switch the clauses depending on which conjunction we use

Ga ke ye sekolong ka jaana ke a lwala = I didn't go to school since I'm sick

Ga go nna dijo ka jaana Ga ke a peye = There's no food since I didn't cook

O tagilwe ka jaana o nwetse bojalwa = You're drunk since you drank beer.

Ka jaana and *ka ntlha* are more or less equivalent to *ka gore* and used in the same way. Check the local dialect to see which is most prevalent. For since as an adverb of time use *e sale* (or concord + *sale*)

E sale ba tsamaile ke ntse ke lela = Since they went away I have been crying

Fa e sale a ja nama o a bobola = Since he ate the meat he is sick

After certain conjunctions, the Participial is used. The change is minimal (*o* → *a* in the 3rd Person singular). For more on this, see the Participial section.

Kgotsa and *kana* are also similar.

A o a tla kana o a sala? = Are you coming or are you staying?

A o ja nama kgotsa merogo? = Do you eat meat or vegetables?

Gape is used to indicate the opposite, similar in use to *le*:

Ke a bala gape ke a kwala = I read and I write

Note the use of the Long Present form in both clauses

E bile can be used either at the start of in the middle of a sentence:

E bile o tsamaile = Also you have gone

Re ithutile Setswana e bile re lapile = We have studied and furthermore we are tired

Gore is an important conjunction which is used to introduce object noun clauses (a two-verb sentence where the second verb has a subject and sometimes an object, and the whole clause functions as the object of the first verb):

Ke itse gore o tla tla kamoso = I know that he will come tomorrow

The whole clause *gore o tla tla kamoso* answers the question “what do I know?”

Ke bona gore ga ba na dikgomo = I see that they don't have cows

Ke nagana gore ke tla ya sekolong = I think that I'll go to school

Ke utlwile gore legodu le utswa madi a gago = I heard you got robbed

Gore can also be used in a two verb sentence to indicate “where”, “when” and “whose”:

Ke itse gore o batlang = I know what you want

Ke itse gore sekolo se kae = I know where the school is

Ke itse gore o tla leng = I know when he will come

Ke itse gore ke selepe sa ga mang = I know whose axe it is

To form “how”, just use the infinitive of the verb:

Ke itse go apaya nama = I know how to cook meat

For more with *gore* see the Subjunctive section.

ko	in, at	ka tlase ga	below
mo	in, inside	kwa ntle ga	outside
kwa	at	gaufi le	beside
ka	by, with	mo/fa pele	in front, before
le	with	morago ga	after
ka ga	about	ko morago	behind
godimo ga	above		

Table 4.12: Setswana prepositions.

4.10 Prepositions

Prepositions are words that precede a noun or pronoun and express a relation to another word or clause in the sentence. My grade school teacher always told us that if you can use a word in front of “the cow” and have it make sense it’s a preposition (on the cow, in the cow, with the cow, etc). Table 4.12 has a list of prepositions.

Mo, *ko*, and *kwa* will be discussed further in the Copula section in Chapter 5.

Ke tlitle ka sefofane = I came by airplane

O bolaile monna ka thipa = He killed the man with a knife

O dira eng ka nku eo? = What are you doing with that sheep?

Ka is also used to form many adverbs in Setswana (for more on this, see the Adverbs section):

Ke bua le wena = I’m talking with you

A ke tsamaya le wena = Can I go with you (colloquially = to date)

O buile ka ga bona = He spoke about them

These prepositions are used for the Absolute (Emphatic) pronouns. To use regular personal pronouns place them before the verb and use the ending *-ela*.

Baya dipampiri mo godimo ga tafale = Put the paper above (on top of) the table

Tsaya beke ka fa tlase ga tafale = Take the bag from under the table

Tsamaya kwa ntle ga paposing = Go outside of the classroom

Many prepositions take *ga* afterwards to show relation to the object they are acting on (similar to personal possession - setilo sa ga Tshepo). *Gaufi* is similar in that it uses *le* to show relation to the object:

Ntlo yame e gaufi le ntlo ya gago = My house is beside (near) your house

Some prepositions can be combined, like in English:

Boela ko morago = Come in at the back (behind)

Ke tla ithuta Seburu morago ga ke ithuta Setswana = I will study Afrikaans after I study Setswana

Ke e beile fa pele ga dibuka = I put it in front of the books (depending on the dialect *ha* may also be used)

There are many other prepositions and most of them use some kind of linking word to show relation to their object. For more on the how and why of this, see the “*Go*, *Mo*-, *Go*-, *Fa*-” section.

4.11 Ko, Ka & Le

Translations aside, when dealing with any concept of place or location, use *ko*:

Ke ile ko tropong = I went to town

O tswa ko sekolong = You are from school

Ba ko kae = Where are they (at)?

Use *ka* for anything having to do with times or dates

Ke tla boa ka Labobedi = I will return on Tuesday

Kopano e tla nna ka 17 July = The meeting will be on July 17

Apartheid e fedile ka 1994 = Apartheid ended in 1994

Ke tla apaya dijo ka 7 = I will serve cook food at 7

Ka and *le* are also easily confused. *Le* can mean “with” as well as “and” while *ka* can be rendered as “by means of” or “about” in addition to “at”

Ke tla kopana le wena = I will meet with you

Ke tsamaya le wena = I go with you

Ke tsamaile ka teksi = I traveled by means of taxi

Ke kwala ka pene = I write with (by means of) a pen

O tshega le nna = You laugh with me

O tshega ka nna = You laugh at me

Ka is also used when talking about doing something in a particular language

Ke bua ka Setswana = I speak in Setswana

O ruta ka Sekgoa = I teach in English

4.12 Adverbs

Both “strong” and “weak” adjectives have already been covered, but what about adverbs? By now you may have figured out something about them on your own just from trying to speak Setswana. There are three different ways to form adverbs in Setswana.

1. **Subject + concord + verb + ka + adj./noun** For example:

Ke tabogile ka bonya = I ran slowly

Ke tabogile ka bonako = I ran fast

Ke tabogile ka bonolo = I ran easily

This is the most common and seems to work with the “strong adjectives” (those that fit into relative clauses). These also happen to be nouns. No linking pronoun (concord) is needed after the verb. And since they don’t require an adjectival prefix to be an adjective, none is necessary for an adverb either.

The verbs use *ka* (with) to form the adverb by placing the noun after it, much the same way we do in English. The English translations above could alternately read:

Ke tabogile ka bonya = I ran with slowness

Ke tabogile ka bonako = I ran with speed

Ke tabogile ka bonolo = I ran with ease

Which is almost exactly how they sound in Setswana. This is by far the most common way to make adverbs in Setswana and you have probably already encountered it just by asking people to speak slower (*Bua ka bonya!*)

2. **Subject + concord + verb + concord-adjectival stem (suffix):**

Ke dirile sentle = I did well

Ke gorogile seša = I arrived recently

Ke dirile maswe = I did poorly

Ke apare bontle = I dressed beautifully

Ke apeile monate = I cooked deliciously

This works with the “weak adjectives.” The concord (adverbial prefix) seems to be whatever is used to make the noun. For example *bontle* also means beauty. If no noun form exists for the adjective, the prefix *se* is usually used. No other linking pronoun is required.

These adverbs are also nouns, but because they correspond to adjectives they don’t need *ka* as a connector and can be placed directly after the verb. Even if you don’t know exactly what the adverb means, you can usually guess if you know the adjectival suffix. For example, everything

ending in *-ntle* is good (beauty, niceness) while everything ending in *-šwe* is bad (ugly, dirty).

3. Subject + concord + verb

Ke siame = I am well

O remaka dikgong = She chops the wood a lot

Some verbs have the adverb built in. There aren't many of them, but they're also the easiest to use since you don't have to add anything extra. There are a few special cases, having to do with the adverbs "much," "a lot," and "usually." For more on this see the Verb Extensions and the Habitual Mood sections.

Most adverbs in English end in *-ly*, and many can be found in the dictionary with the appropriate translation (using either *ka* or the noun formed from the adjectival suffix). If not, you can create an adverb in Setswana by following the rules above in the same way you would add *-ly* to an adjective in English.

Chapter 5

Bring the Pain

Congratulations! If you've made it this far it means you have successfully completed the PST language curriculum. You have accomplished more linguistically than many (okay, most) previous volunteers and if you learn nothing else about Setswana in the next two years you will still be able to communicate effectively in your target language. While you may not have mastered all the concepts and vocabulary in training, with continued practice you will be able to use them on a daily basis. This advanced section is meant to complement the other training materials you received and allow you to move into a higher level of fluency. It will also hopefully provide some explanation of the grammatical concepts you will encounter during your two years at site. That being said, this is a work in progress and is by no means a complete language course. It is merely a supplement created to facilitate ongoing language learning and any additions or corrections you are able to offer will be greatly appreciated by your language committee. Now go forth and *ithuta puo e e monate*.

5.1 Ongoing language learning tips

By now you have probably come up with many of your own strategies for learning Setswana. Some of you may be flash card junkies, memorizing vocab lists. Others may have sticky notes with Setswana words plastered all over your host family's house, much to their puzzlement. These are all great. The rest of the ideas on this page have been gleaned from the many volunteers who have come before you, as well as from educational best practices for teaching and learning languages.

Pick up a copy of the Self-Study language book from the Peace Corps Office. It is full of good ideas too numerous to mention here. Find the ones that work for you and use them.

If you have a notebook from PST, you may want to revise it once at site (trust us, you'll have the time) and take out the clutter. List all the vocab and figure out what you know and what you still need to work on. Write down any

grammar rules you learned as well as any colloquial phrasing. This not only helps you to remember what you learned in PST, but also makes it easier to find out if the way they speak at site is any different from what you learned in training.

Find a tutor. This may or may not be that easy, but high school students tend to work well. Many want to improve their English just like you want to improve your Setswana and the lure of a little extra money or a cool drink doesn't hurt. The dialect at each site is different so this can help you figure out if what you were taught in training works where you are. That being said, they probably won't be able to explain everything you want to know, especially complex grammar. If you have something like that, one good way to go about it is to make up a lot of examples, have your tutor translate them for you, then try to devise if there is a pattern. Tutors are also great for vocab and slang (especially high schoolers).

Get some kids books in Setswana. More than likely your school has a few Foundation Phase readers you can borrow or make copies of. These are full of good vocab and you can read at your own pace. If you get stuck, your tutor can help. It may feel a little silly to be reading a first grader's book, especially of you have to look up every third word in the dictionary or ask your host sister for help. But it will pay off. If you're a religious type, the Setswana Bible is often the easiest book to find and translations are a snap (assuming you brought your own or can find one in English).

Hang out with your host family. Most Peace Corps countries put volunteers in their own places after PST. South Africa is one of the few where we continue to live with local families. But these families have a wealth of information about the language. They may get annoyed when you ask so many questions, or frustrated when they explain something and you don't get it (or don't know how to explain something that you don't get). But the more you try to talk to them in Setswana (and the more they talk to you), the more you will understand. I've learned more interesting vocab sitting around a fire with my family than I've learned from any book. Conversation is one of the best ways to practice.

Watch Generations. If your family has a TV, this is probably what it will be tuned to at 8:00 pm. It's great because one third of it is in Setswana and it has subtitled English translations below. Most of the women on the show speak Setswana, and it's a good way to learn colloquialisms and vocab you might not get in your village. Also it's addicting. If you get Motswedding FM or another radio station in your village, there are a lot of good programs and music on it too.

Don't be afraid to mix Setswana with English. Try to say as much as you can in Setswana, but if you don't know a word or two just slip them in in English. They do it on Generations all the time. People will be able to understand you better, and you'll be able to say more. For certain things, there just aren't Setswana words (like most modern technologies) and for some things people are actually more familiar with the Anglicized words than the "proper" Setswana (di-condoms, etc). So mix it up a little bit.

Keep a notebook. I have a little one I carry around with me in my pocket

and write down new and interesting words I hear. That way I can remember them later on and look them up or ask someone bilingual what they mean if I still can't figure them out. It's like a mini-dictionary. I make my learners use the same thing for studying English, since my schools don't have real Setswana-English dictionaries. It's also nice to be able to look back and see how much you've learned.

Ask other volunteers what methods of language learning work for them, and add these to your repertoire of learning processes. Other volunteers are a great resource, so use them. They may even write a grammar manual for you. But don't get discouraged if you seem "behind" your peers. Everyone learns differently, and at their own pace.

Become as aware as possible of what learning processes or styles suite you best, and guide yourself to continue learning. Whatever works best for you, do it. If grammar provides a helpful structure for learning, then go crazy with this packet. If it doesn't, fine. Find what works for you and do it. Even if you only speak in infinitive verbs and nouns, people will still be able to understand you.

Try to be consistent with your language learning. This may be hard with the ups and downs at site, but finding a means of keeping focused on language (even if it's just to flirt with somebody at work) helps a great deal.

Use the language as much as possible. The responses you get from local people will be very encouraging and help you maintain a desire to learn more. I get far more compliments on my language and my horse than I do on my actual job.

By and large language learning here is a self-directed process. The more effort you put in, the more ability you get will out. So when in doubt,

KEEP TRYING!

***Hi, Ryan here again. All the tips that Art has laid down above are highly effective, and well worth trying. But if we step back for a moment, it's worth considering the process by which most people learn a new language and what conditions are usually necessary.

It's an unfortunate truth that most South African PCVs do not become fluent in their target language. There are various reasons for this, but probably the most important one is that English is the language of power and influence here. The condition of "immersion," often advertised in foreign language courses, means that speaking a target language is *necessary* to get what you need on an everyday basis. For most people, this kind of brute-force motivation is a requirement to make much progress in a language beyond the basics, but it simply doesn't exist in South Africa for most PCVs. It will likely be possible (but hopefully not desirable) to finish your service without ever using more than a few words of Setswana.

Some volunteers could honestly care less if they learn their language, and that is their prerogative. But it's fair to say that a larger number finish their service wishing they could have learned more. Some (like myself) even spend a great deal of time working on the language to seemingly little effect. With the gift of hindsight, I would say the most important factor in your language learning

is to make your living situation as immersive as possible. Flash cards and other tricks will only get you so far. The most important thing is be trying to listen, understand, and speak as much as possible. If you are really committed, insist that your host family speak to you only in Setswana. Get them to explain things in Setswana, and resort to English explanations as little as possible. Strike up random conversations with gogos on the taxi.

What makes this approach hard is that it is intensely awkward (at least at first). You will make a complete ass out of yourself on a nearly constant basis. You will say ridiculous and probably insulting things fairly frequently. You will stand there clueless having people repeat things over and over. But it's the larger principle standing behind Art's (very useful) tips, and by far the most common way to learn a second language.***

5.2 Sentence Construction and Syntax

A quick note before we dive into more complex grammar. Setswana does not have the same kind of broad usage agreement that English does. Practices vary considerably from place to place, and it may well be the case that your LCFs or host family will strongly disagree with the usages set down below, or have never heard of certain constructions. When in doubt, follow local standards. In addition, most of the next two chapters will be fairly dry elaboration of diverse grammar constructions. For more interesting stuff, flip to the appendices.

By now you should be able to form a wide variety of simple sentences using the pattern:

Subject + concord + a + verb

For example:

Susie o a tsamaya = Susie is going/Susie goes

Ntšwa e a loma = The dog is biting/The dog bites

Ke a tla = I am coming*

And

Subject + concord + verb + direct object

For example: Ke ya teropong = I go to town

Mosadi o ithuta Setswana = The woman studies Setswana

The first way is called the “long present” and is used with intransitive verbs. The second is the regular present and is used with transitive verbs that take an object. Verbs followed by an adverb of time, such as now, use the “long present” form as do verbs followed by a conjunction and a separate clause (see the Conjunction section).

Ke a tsamaya jaanong = I am leaving now

Ke a mmitsa fela ga a utlwe = I'm calling him but he doesn't hear

*You may have heard this spoken as *Ke e tla*. There is no object pronoun in this sentence, rather the *e* sound is the result of a euphonic addition common with Setswana verbs that contain an l syllable.

5.3 Objects

For sentences with both a direct and indirect object, the indirect object comes first, either before the verb (using a pronoun) or after the verb (using a noun).

Subject + concord + verb + indirect object + direct object

For example:

Ke go fa madi = I give money to you

Ke fa Thabo madi = I give Thabo money

Some verbs need a helping hand to accept a personal object (or a place). This is the extension *-ela*. It will be explained more in depth later on as a Verb Extension.

Subject + concord + verb-ela + personal object

For example:

Ke kwalela John = I'm writing to John

Ke kwalela John lekwalo = I'm writing John a letter

In this case the indirect object comes second. But for an impersonal direct object only, *-ela* is not needed:

Ke kwala lekwalo = I'm writing a letter

If the personal object is replaced by a pronoun, however, *-ela* is needed (*a* → *e*):

Ke a mo kwalele = I'm writing to him (John)

In some instances we need another connector to complete the sentence:

Subject + verb-ela + direct object + ko go + indirect object

For example:

Ke ragela bolo ko go Thabo = I kick the ball to Thabo

The *ko go* literally refers to the place where the indirect object is. It will also be explained more later as a Locative connector.

You should already know how to add adjectives to a sentence. To add multiple modifiers (adjectives, adverbs, etc) to a simple sentence, the following order is observed:

**Subject + concord + verb + manner (how) + location (where) +
time (when)**

For example:

Bana ba jele ka bonako ko tropong gompiano = The children have eaten quickly in town today.

5.4 Building More Complex Sentences

5.4.1 Two Verb Sentences

You should remember to use two verbs in a sentence.

Subject + concord + verb (1) + go + verb (2)

For example:

Ke batla go tsamaya = I want to go

Kolobe e kgona go ja sengwe le sengwe = The pig is able to eat everything

The first part is the same as above. After the first verb, add the infinitive of the second verb just like in English. Direct objects are added after the verb as normal. Since the 2nd verb follows the 1st, no helping *a* is needed:

Ke itumela go go bona = I am happy to see you

Sometimes *go* will appear twice in a sentence. One is the infinitive, the other is the Personal Object Pronoun.

When using the future tense (*tla*), however, you don't add the *go* after *tla* even though it is a verb. In this case it is just being used for tense formation. You do need to add *go* if you use another verb:

Subject + concord + tla + verb (1) + go + verb (2)

For example:

Ke tla batla go šeba Generations kamoso = I will want to watch Generations tomorrow

Ntšwa e tla kgona go loma kgantele = The dog will be able to bite later

O tla tla go bona lesea = You will come to see the baby

In the commonly used phrase *Ke tla go bona* (I'll see you) the *go* actually refers to the direct object "you."

Now, you may want to try to make a compound sentence, a single sentence expressing two or more ideas. For this you need to use a conjunction. However in Setswana, the word *le* (and) is only used for making lists of nouns or infinitive verbs:

Ke na le dibuka le pampiri = I have books and paper

Nna le Thabang re ile ko Tsoe = Thabang and I went to Tsoe

Re ya go ja le go nwa = We are going to eat and drink

To link two or more ideas together in a single sentence, you need to use a conjunction like *mme* (but, however), *gape* (again, also), or *fela* (but). Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + verb (1) + conjunction + concord + verb (2)

Here are some examples:

Ke rata basadi mme ke tshaba HIV = I like women but I fear HIV

Tshepo o dira sentle ko sekolo na gape o tshameka soccer = Tshepo does well in school and also plays soccer

Basimane ba batla go tsameka balo fela balo e puntshegile = The boys want to play soccer but the ball has got a puncture

Ke ya go tshameka bolo lefa pula e a na = I'm going to play soccer even if it rains

5.4.2 Two Subject Sentences

Here's how to use two verbs with two separate subjects in the same sentence. Note the last verb ending changes to *-e* (this is actually the subjunctive tense, but we'll get to that in due course):

Subject (1) + concord + verb (1) + gore + subject (2) + concord + verb (2) -e

For example:

Ke batla gore o nthuse = I want you to help me

5.4.3 Simultaneous Actions

Sometimes the same subject(s) will be doing two or more things at once. This is called the Concurrent Mood. To form this mood, simply use the subject concord twice with all the verbs to indicate the appropriate actions. No conjunction is necessary:

Subject + concord + verb (1) + concord + verb (2)

For example:

Batho ba bina ba opela = The people sing and dance (at the same time)

5.4.4 Auxiliary (Deficient) Verbs

The above works for regular verbs. But in Setswana there are also many auxiliary verbs (they work like helping verbs in English). These verbs cannot stand on their own and must accompany another regular verb. For this reason they are also sometimes referred to condescendingly as Deficient verbs. They form part of a multiverbal predicate and are used to modify the regular verb. The auxiliary verb is almost always followed by the Participial of the subjectival concord (except in the case of irregular auxiliary verbs like *tshwanetse*), unlike in a normal two-verb sentence where *go* goes in between both verbs to form the infinitive. Only the main verb may carry an objectival concord. Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + verb + auxiliary verb + participial + verb

For example

Re tloga re tsamaya = We will leave soon

O be a apaya = He should cook now

Ba tshwanetse go dira = They ought to do

Some common auxiliary verbs are dealt with later on in other sections, as is the Participial. The brown dictionary will tell you if the verb you are looking at is or *can* be used as an auxiliary verb (V. S. Aux.)

In general, Setswana doesn't tolerate "run-on" sentences as much as English. Even though you might not hear it when people are speaking, they do use full stops and start new sentences. For more ways of forming complex sentences see the section on Dependent Clauses.

5.4.5 Interrogatives

Sentences with question words (*eng*, *mang*, *kae*, *-fe*, *leng*, *goreng*, etc) are automatically interrogative and need nothing else.

Ke nako mang? = What time is it?

O tswa kae? = Where are you from?

Ke eng? = What is it?

Ke mang yo o opelang? = Who is singing?

Ke pitse ya ga mang = Who's horse is it?

Ke dipitse tsa bo mang = Who's horses are they?

The *ga* is used when it is assumed that the owner of the thing is a single person, *bo* indicates that there may be several owners.

When asking a question with *goreng*, it must be followed by the Participial form of the verb (*o* → *a* in 3rd person singular; see the Participial section for more):

Goreng a ne a ithuta Setswana = Why was he studying Setswana
 Goreng a ile Pretoria = Why did she go to Pretoria

To make any other sentence a question, add A to the beginning.

A o na le lekgarebe? = Do you have a girlfriend?

A o a apaya? = Are you cooking?

Note: $o + a = wa$ in spoken Setswana. This is also commutative.

Many times simply stating the negative will be used to ask a question:

Ga go na sukiri ko shopong? = Is there any sugar at the shop?

5.5 So Many Concorde

By now you have probably seen a sentence that looks something like this:

Ntšwa e, e ne e e loma beke e e fetileng = This dog was biting it last week

And you wonder what all those *e*'s are for. In Setswana concords do a lot of work, and the same letter (or two) can mean different things depending on its position in the sentence. In this case, the *e*'s represent four different things.

1. **Demonstrative Pronoun:** *Ntšwa e, e ne e e loma beke e e fetileng*

This *e* is used to indicate which dog the speaker is talking about; here it is *this* dog. The demonstrative pronoun relates to the noun being referred to, and hence it is of the same noun class.

2. **Concord & Participial:** *Ntšwa e, e ne e e loma beke e e fetileng*

These two *e*'s are used to form the past imperfect tense, with *ne* in between. The first is the concord, the second is the participial. Many of the more exotic tenses and constructions in Setswana make use of participials or additional concords. We'll get to those later.

3. **Direct Object Pronoun:** *Ntšwa e, e ne e e loma beke e e fetileng*

This *e* is taking the place of another word from the same noun class as the dog. The dog could be biting a pig, a cat, or a cow, but they would all use the same pronoun *e* just like English uses it.

4. **Relative Clause:** *Ntšwa e, e ne e loma beke e e fetileng*

These last two *e*'s are part of an clause that is describing *beke* (*e e fetileng*). They relate to the noun *beke* and are thus of the same class. The literal translation of this in English would be "this week that is passing" and so it uses both the concord and the demonstrative pronoun in its construction. This is also called the "strong adjective" in some books.

As another example, sometimes you want to define one thing by referring to something else. This can be a little tricky but here's one way it can be done:

Subject + demonstrative pronoun + concord + object pronoun + verb (-ng)

For example:

Ke mpho eo e fentseng = It's a gift that you win (prize)

Ke batla go itse se o se nagana = I want to know this thing that you think (your opinion)

Unlike in English you don't need a conjunction (that) to connect the two ideas, just use the concord to show agreement.

In spoken Setswana, the tone of the speaker and the pauses and inflections they use will help the listener to understand the meaning of the sentence. In written Setswana, the position of words in the sentence and any punctuation are all the reader has to use for clues. We can understand the gist of the sentence with only a few main words (*ntšwa*, *loma*, *beke*, and *fetileng*) without having to delve into all those e's that connect it together. The grammar topics discussed above should have been covered in PST but it can still be daunting to see them all used in one sentence.

5.6 The Copula

By now you've probably noticed that Setswana lacks something most English speakers take for granted every day: the word "is." There is no single verb in Setswana that encompasses everything that the verb to be means in English. But here are some helpful substitutes.

The single closest thing in Setswana to to be is *go nna* but it only works sometimes. Here's the formula for when it does:

Concord + nna/ntse + noun/adjective

For example:

Ke nna Tshepo = I am Tshepo

Pula ya na = The rain is here/It is raining

For non-human objects, remove the first n from *нна*. Sometimes *go nna* becomes *go ntse* to denote the past tense, even if we would think in English that action is happening in the present. This is for the same reason that verbs like *robotse* stay in the past tense.

Ba ntse sentle = They are well

Ke ntse fela = I'm just chillin'

5.6.1 Identificative: People and Things

The Personal Identificative is just the concord. Present tense:

Subject + concord + noun/adjective

For example:

Ke moithaopi = I am a volunteer

O morutabana = You are a teacher

A o bothale? = Are you clever?

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + noun/adjective

For example:

Ga ke moithaopi = I'm not a volunteer

Ga o morutabana = You aren't a teacher

Ga o bothale = You aren't clever

5.6.2 General Identificative (when people aren't involved)

Present tense:

Ke + noun/adjective

For example:

Ke pitse ya me = It is my horse

Ke dikousu = They are socks

The negative is:

ga sé + noun/adjective

Ga sé ntlo = It is not a house

Ga sé kgomo ya me = It is not my cow

For questions, the word order changes:

Subject + ke + question word

For example:

Tlong ke eng? = What is a hedgehog?

Dikgomo tseo ke tsa bo mang? = Whose cows are those there?

Past tense (imperfect):

Subject + concord + ne + participial + le + adjective

Ke ne ke le morutabana = I was a teacher

O ne o le moithaopi = You were a volunteer

O ne a le ngwana = He was a child

E ne e le kgomo mme ke nama jaanong = It was a cow but now it's meat

The negative is:

Subject + concord + ne + participial + se + adjective

For example:

Ke ne ke se molemi = I was not/never a farmer

O ne a se moagi = He was never a builder

By the way, this is the same as the Past Continuous (Imperfect) Tense.
Future Tense:

Subject + concord + tla + nna + adjective

For example:

Ke tla nna moithuti ko yunibesiti = I will be a student at university

O tla nna molemi = She will be a farmer

E tla na ntlo fa ke ka fetsa go aga = It will be a house when I am finished building

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + kitla + participial + nna + adjective

For example:

Ga nkitla ke nna moithaopi = I will not be a volunteer

Ga a kitla e nna molemi = She will not be a volunteer

This follows the future tense formation and adds *nna*. For alternative future negative tense formations that may be used at your site, see that section.

5.6.3 Locative To Be: giving position

Here's the formula:

**Subject + concord + mo/ko/kwa + location + -ng (mo if it is here,
ko if it is there, kwa if it is far away)**

For example:

Bana ba mo klaseng = The children are in the classroom (here)
 Dipudi di ko sakeng. = The goats are in the kraal (there) Batsadi
 ba me ba kwa America = My parents are in America (far away)

Note that $a + -ng = eng$ (*lesaka* → *lesakeng* → *sakeng*)

Sometimes the *mo/ko/kwa* are omitted:

Ke mo teng/ Ke teng = I am here

A o Kuruman? = Is he/she in Kuruman?

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + mo/ko/kwa + location + -ng:

Dipudi ga di ko sakeng = The goats are not in the kraal

Ga o yo = It's not here

Past Tense:

**Subject + concord + ne + participial + mo/ko/kwa + location +
-ng:**

Ke ne ke le ko Kuruman = I was at Kuruman

O ne a le mo klaseng = She was in class

The negative is:

**Subject + concord + ne + participial + se + mo/ko/kwa + location
+ -ng:**

Ke ne ke se ko Kuruman = I was not in Kuruman

O ne o se mo sekolong = You were not at school

Future Tense:

**Subject + concord + tla + nna/dula + mo/ko/kwa + location +
-ng:**

Ke tla nna ko Perth = I will be in Perth

O tla dula mo Tsoe = You will be in Tsoe

The negative is:

**Subject + ga + concord + kitla + participial + nna + mo/ko/kwa
+ location + -ng:**

Ga nkitla ke nna ko tropong = I won't be in town

Ga o kitla o nna Botswana = You won't be in Botswana

Again this corresponds to the future negative tense plus *nna* so it may be different depending on the dialect at your site. See the section on other verb forms for more ways to make this tense.

5.6.4 Descriptive To Be: Describing something

Present Tense:

Subject + concord + adjective/noun:

Monna o maswe = The man is ugly

Dikolobe di tlhaga = The pigs are wild

These are formed just as you would any other simple sentence in Setswana and work for strong adjectives. For describing yourself, see the Identificative section. Otherwise just make adjectives like you learned to before.

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + adjective/noun:

Monna ga a maswe, tota = The man isn't really ugly

Dikolobe ga di tlhaga = The pigs aren't wild

The future and past tenses are the same as used above for the Identificative.

5.6.5 General Use: Expression of an Idea

Here's a formula for general conditions like the weather:

Go + noun:

Go tsididi = It is cold

Go letsatsi = It is sunny

Go lefifi = It is dark

Go go ntle = It is all good

Go ntse jalo = It's like that/It's fine

These are used for general states of being or for things like the weather. A more general way to use *go* is to add *na le* after it and get a phrase equivalent to there is/are in English:

Go na le + noun:

Go na le masi mo friji = There is milk in the fridge

Go na le dinku ko sakeng = There are sheep in the kraal

The negative is:

Ga go + noun:

Ga go molato = There is no problem

Or:

Ga go na + noun

Ga go na sepe mo friji. Ke a sokola = There's nothing in the fridge.
I'm struggling

For past tense, *le* is used in the positive past tense to indicate "being." It changes to *se* in the negative:

Go ne go (na) le + noun

For example:

Go ne go le difenstere, mme di thubegile = There were windows but they broke

Go ne go le tapole, mme ke e jele = There was a potato but I ate it

Go ne go na le barutabana mo phaposing = There were teachers in the class

The negative is:

Go ne go se (na) + noun:

Go ne go se dipitse ko sakeng = There were no horses in the kraal

In general the *na* is optional. Check your local dialect to make sure.

Future Tense:

Go tla bo go na le + noun:

A go tla bo go na le barutabana mo phaposing? = Will there be any teachers in the classroom?

The negative is:

Go tla bo go sena + noun:

Go tla bo go se na barutabana mo phaposing = There won't be any teachers in the classroom

An alternative formation is:

Go tla nna + noun:

Go tla nna borotho fa nka fetsa go duba = There will be bread when I am finished baking

Go tla nna dikgomo ko sakeng fa nka fetsa go di thiba = There will be cows in the kraal when I finish herding them

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + kitla + concord + nna + noun:

Ga go kitla go nna dijo mo pitseng bosigo = There won't be food in the pot tonight

These forms work only when followed by nouns or pronouns. To talk about something you were doing in the past or will be doing in the future, you need to use a different verb form, which will be explained in more detail later.

Past Tense (was -ing/have been -ing):

Subject + concord + ntse + participial + verb:

Ke ntse ke roka = I have been sewing

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + ntse + participial + verb (ending in e):

Ke ntse ke sa roke = I haven't been sewing

Future Tense:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + verb (or le + place):

Kamoso ke tla kgona go tsamaya = Tomorrow I will be able to leave

Kamoso bana ba tla be ba lwala = Tomorrow children will be sick

Bosigo Thabo o tla be a le fa = Tonight Thabo will be here

Ke tlaa bo ke reka = I shall be in the process of buying

Ba tla bo ba remile = they will by then have chopped

Beke e tlang ke tla be ke le ko Morongwa = Next week I will be at Morongwa

This tense means approximately "will be" and is used for events in the future which are not assured of happening (see Progressive Construct).

The negative is:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + sa + verb (ending in e):

O tla bo a sa reke bupi = You won't be buying bupi

The future descriptive copulative adds *le*:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + le + noun/adjective:

Setlhare se tla bo se le seleele ngwaga e e tlang = The tree will be tall next year

Ke tla bo ke le moleele ngwaga e e tlang = I will be tall next year

The negative changes *le* to *se*:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + se + noun/adjective:

Ke tla bo ke se moleele ngwaga e e tlang = I won't be tall next year

The future descriptive form will usually be followed by a specific time reference or expression (i.e., *ngwaga e e tlang*).

The verb stem *nna* (to be/become) will be used for more general statements without a specific accompanying time reference:

Subject + concord + tla + nna + (concord + go + verb) or (adjective/noun):

Re tla nna re go gopola ka metlha = We will be thinking of you always

Setlhare se tla nna seele = The tree will become tall

And the negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + kitla + participial + nna + (go + verb) or (adj/noun):

Ga nkitla ke mo gopola = I won't be missing her

This way is used more to imply a continuing state of being in the future rather than just a one-time event.

For use with the past participial:

Ga + verb (normal or passive):

Ga tse eng? = What is/was said?

Go ne ga jewa = Eating was done

Go ne ga nowa = Drinking was done

Ga tla motho = There came a man

This is used to indicate the “past neutral” and should not be confused with the negative uses of *ga*. When used with the passive form, the action can happen in the past or the present. When used with the simple present, it indicates that the action happened in the past

5.6.6 Copulative “To Have”

The verb *na le* in Setswana is different than other verbs in that it is actually a copulative construction (hence why it has two words). *Na* is the shortened form of the verb *go nna* (see above) and *le* is a preposition that means “with:”

Ke na le pitse = I am with a horse (I have a horse)

Thabo o na le mmereko = Thabo is with work (Thabo has work)

The literal translation of *na le* is “to be with” but in most cases it is rendered in English as “to have”. This will help make sense of some odd Setswana phrasing:

Letsatsi le na le maru = The day is cloudy (The day has clouds)

Also recall that the negative formation drops the *le* and the positive past perfect tense is just *ne*:

Ga ke na madi = I don’t have money

Ke ne madi = I have had madi

Sometimes *sa* is added to the present negative formation:

O ne o se na madi = You did not have money

Needless to say, in Setswana there are a lot of different ways to say “to be.” But luckily many Setswana verbs already contain a form of “to be” in them, so it is not needed as an auxiliary verb and therefore is used much less than in English. Many other things in Setswana also take the place of “to be” in certain situations, such as the passive voice verb extension (is done, etc). You’ll hardly miss it at all. Either that, or you’ll have a psychotic episode.

5.7 Participial

The Participial is like a helping concord. It is used in dependent clauses and also to form different tenses and moods in Setswana (Past Continuous, Future negative, etc). In English the Present Participial is the ending “-ing” and the Past Participial is the ending “-ed.” The pronunciation in Setswana is all high-toned. Here’s an example:

Subject + concord + verb + direct object + participial + verb:

Ke bona banna ba bereka = I see the men working

Ke bona monna a nwa = I see a man drinking

Ke bonye ditonki di goga kara = I saw donkeys pulling a wagon

Table 5.1: The indicative compared to the participial.

NC	Indicative		Participial	
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.
1	o	ba	a	ba
2	o	e	o	e
3	le	a	le	a
4	se	di	se	di
5	e	di	e	di
6	lo	di	lo	di
7	Bo	a	bo	a
8	go		go	

Even when talking about the past, in this case we still use the Present Participial (basically whenever we would use *ing* as the Present Participial in English). Consult Table 5.1.

The only difference between the Indicative and the Participial is that the *o* of Class 1 singular changes to *a*. Since Class 1 singular is also the 3rd Person singular, we only need to worry about this when talking about another person. This also helps reduce confusion between the 2nd and 3rd Person singular.

The negative is:

Participial + sa + verb (ending in e):

Ke bona banna ba sa bereke = I see the men not working

Ke bona monna a sa nwe = I see a man not drinking

Ke bonye ditonki di sa goge kara = I saw donkeys not pulling a cart

The Participial is also used after many conjunctions in Setswana. For example: *fa* (if, when), *jaaka* (as, how), *lefa* (although), *ka* (as, since), *fa e sale* (since), *ke eng* (why), *ke kantlha ya eng* (on account of) and *go fitlhelela* (until) take the Participial when beginning a new clause:

Fa ba reka nama = If they buy meat

Fa ba sa reke nama = If they don't buy meat

Fa e sale o kwala tirogae = Since you are writing homework

Some question words like *goreng* also take the Participial:

Goreng a ne a ithuta Setswana = Why was he studying Setswana

Copulative constructions add *le* for the positive and *se* for the negative:

Goreng + subject + participial + le/se + noun/adjective:

Goreng a le ngaka? = Why is he a doctor?

Goreng a se na mosadi? = Why doesn't he have a woman (wife)?

The Past Participial positive is formed the same way, using the regular Past Tense formation with the Participial. The Past Participial negative is formed without the usual intermediate *a* between the concord and verb (but with *sa* taking its place).

Positive:

Subject + Participial + Past Tense verb:

Ka ke rekile dijo = Since I bought food

Fa a batlile tee = If he wanted tea

Negative:

Subject + Participial + *sa* + Present Tense verb:

Ka ke sa reka dijo = Since I didn't buy food

Fa a sa batla tee = If he didn't want tea

For more examples see "*First Steps in Spoken Setswana*," p. 63.

5.8 Verb Extensions

In many Bantu languages, the meaning of verbs can be altered by the attachment of different suffixes to the end. You may already have encountered verbs that look similar (i.e., have the same stem) and have meanings that are related. These are most probably verbs that have been transformed through the addition or subtraction of suffixes. Knowledge of such suffixes is a powerful tool; it can multiply your vocabulary and enable you to use structural clues to identify the meaning of new words. Setswana has nine different independent verb extensions, though not every verb will accept all nine and many would not make sense even if they did. You can also combine certain suffixes to make new meanings. The possibilities are endless.

The first verb extension is one you should already know, but it is a good place to start. It is the plural Command Form (or Imperative Mood):

Verb + -ng:

Ithuteng = Study (you all)

Dulang. = Sit down (you all)

Reetsang. = Listen up (you all)

(If the singular command form changes its ending to *-e*, this is preserved in the plural.) This should have been covered in PST. Whenever you want to tell more than one person (like a class full of your learners) what to do, use this. It only works with these directives though, and not when making a complete sentence.

There is another time when you add *-ng* to a verb, and it's when you use a verb as an adjective or adverb as part of an adjectival clause:

Noun + adjectival connectors + verb + -ng:

Mosimane yo o ragang = The boy is kicking (The kicking boy)

This works the same as using the "Strong adjectives" but instead of an adjective at the end you use a verb (plus *-ing*). It gives roughly the same meaning as adding *-ing* would in English.

Finally, *-eng* is often contracted to *-ng* (because of vowel elision) and added onto a verb to form a question:

O batlang? = What do you want?

O dirang? = What are you doing?

O rileng? = What did you say?

So *wareng* = *o + a + re + eng* (What are you saying?)

The rest of the extensions change the meaning of the verb itself. To make Passive, add *w* before the final vowel:

Nku e rekwa = The sheep is bought

Verbs ending in *-itsa* change to *-ediwa* in Passive form. Past tense is formed by inserting *w* between *l* and *e*:

Re filwe = We have been given

This is a common name in Setswana, one of my favorites. Past tense verbs ending in *-wa* change to *-we*:

O bidiwa → O bidiwe

To make the Causative, change the final *-a* into *--isa*:

Go tsamaya → Go tsamaisa = cause to go (minus *-ya*)

Go reka → Go rekisa (sell = cause to buy)

Past tense ending changes from *-isa* to *-isitse*. Note: verbs ending in *-ala* become *-atsa* in the causative form (not *-isa*). An example is *robatsa* (from *robala + isa = robatsa*). Verbs ending in *-ela* change to *-etsa* (see the verb extension combination section for more.)

To make a verb Transitive (Relative, Prepositional), change the final *-a* into *-ela*. This lets the verb take on an indirect object. For example:

Ke tla go rekela Simba = I will buy Simba for you

Ke a go emela = I wait for you (lit. I stop for you)

Past tense changes from *-ela* to *-etse*. That is used when doing something for or to someone. Some verbs (like *go fa*) are default transitive and do not take *-ela* to add an indirect object. For indirect objects which are things, it is not necessary to add *-ela*. Not every verb needs *-ela*, such as:

Ke go fa dijo = I give you food

Nkadime thipa = Lend me the knife

To make a verb Reciprocal (Reflexive), change the final *a* to *-ana*. This can also carry the meaning of “each other:”

Go ratana = to love one another

Robalana = to sleep around (colloquial, lit. “to sleep with each other”)

Past tense ending changes from *a* to *ye*:

Go ratanye = to have loved one another

To give the meaning of the suffix *-able* in English, change final *a* to *-ega*:

Baithuti ba a rutega = The learners are teachable (lit. the self-teachers are teachable)

This also can carry the meaning “to become” and is sometimes used in place of the passive:

Leoto lame le robegile = My leg is broken (has become broken)

Sometimes *-ega* will appear as *-ala* but retain the same meaning:

utlwala = to be audible/heard

To impart the action of Becoming (Causative Neutral), add *-fala* to the end of the verb. In some instances this may be *-gala*. Verbs with this extension will usually not accept direct objects. For example:

Go dira → Go dirafala: to become done, to happen

To reverse meaning, change the final *-a* to *olola*. This has the same effect as adding the English prefix *un-*:

Go dira (to do) → Go dirolola (to undo)

Go gakwa (to forget) → Go gakolola (to remind/unforget)

To form the Habitual (for an action that happens many times) change the final *-a* to *-aka*. It is also called the Extensive and can carry the meanings “repeatedly,” “extensively,” “much,” or “a lot:”

Go dira (to do) → Go dirakaka (to do many times)

Go bua (to speak) → Go buakaka (to speak a lot, or for a long time)

Some verbs can be used with hyperbole to emphasize meaning. This meaning can roughly be translated as “repeatedly” or “extensively.”

Go roba → Go robaroba = to break into tiny pieces

Go atla → Go atlaatla = to fondle or make out

But some verbs using this derivation take on the meaning of a little:

Go dira → Go diradira = to do a little bit at a time

To make a verb Associative, add *-gana*. This imparts the meaning of “doing together.” It is similar to the Reciprocal, but the action is passive:

Go tshwara → tshwaragana = to be joined together, cooperate

Many common Setswana verbs are created this way. For example *go rekisa* is the causative form of *go reka*. So “to sell” in Setswana actually means “to cause to buy.” Sometimes the suffix can change the meaning dramatically. *Go kgoaga* means to cut, snap or divide but *go kgaoganyana* means to share (to be divided among ourselves).

Certain verb suffixes can be combined to form new meanings. The following is a list of some possible transformations. However not all verbs will accept all suffixes and many would not make sense even if they could.

-ela + ela = -elela (rokelela): to VERB onto, into, about, towards something/someone/somewhere. (This is used when the verb takes two objects. For example, bolelela = to tell (someone something))

-isa + isa = isisa (lebisisa) to VERB intently (Also, if the suffix is reduplicated (doubled), the meaning of the original suffix is intensified. This is sometimes translated as carefully, completely, etc.)

-isa + wa = -isiwa or -iswa (tshwarisiwa) was caused to be VERB

-isa + -ana = -isana (dirisana) to cause to VERB together

-ega + isa = -egisa, -egetsa or -isetsa (reregisa, robegetsa, tshwarisetsa) cause to be -able, cause to become VERB

-ega + -ela = -egela (tshwarelela) to be VERB-able or become for

-ega + -olola = -ologela (dirologela) to become un-VERB

-olola + -wa = -ololwa (dirololwa) being un-VERB

-aka + -wa = -akiwa or -akwa (dirakwa) was VERB a lot

-fala + -ela = -falela (dirafalela) to become VERB for

-fala + -isa = -fatsa (dirafatsa) to become caused to VERB

-ana + -ela = -anela (tshwaraganela) to VERB together for

-ana + -wa = -anya (tshwaraganya) to be VERB together
 -isa + -ela = -etsa (tshwarisetsa) was caused to VERB for
 -fala + -ela + -wa = -falelwa (dirafalelwa) became VERB for
 -ana + -ela + -wa = -anelwa (tshwaraganelwa) held onto VERB

There are likely a great many more, as this is not a comprehensive list.

5.9 Other Verb Modifications

To make a verb Reflexive:

Concord + O.P. + verb:

Ba re ruta Setswana = They teach us Setswana
 Tau e di jele = The lion ate them (the sheep/dinku)

To form the O.P.(object pronoun), use the Concord of the noun acting as the object or the personal object pronouns:

n =	me	re =	we
go =	you	le/lo =	y'all
mo =	him	ba =	they

When using the O.P. *mo* with a verb beginning with *b-*, change *b-* to *mm-*:

Ke mo bona → Ke a mmona

To add *n-* to verbs follow the constructions below:

n + vowel = nk-vowel
 n + g = nkg-
 n + h = nkh-
 n + l = nt-
 n + d = nt-
 n + r = nth-
 n + s = ntsh-
 n + b = mp-
 n + p = mp-
 n + f = mph-
 n + n = nn-

For Reflexive Commands (using a personal object), change final *a* of verb to *e*:

Nkadime = Lend me
 Nthekele = Buy me
 Mphe = Give me

In a full sentence, leave the ending as *-a*. For plural commands, add *-ng*:

Ithuteng = Teach yourselves

To make a verb self-Reflexive:

Concord + i-verb:

Ke a itlhaloganya = I understand myself

Ke itlhalogantse = I understood myself

Some common words are made this way. For example *go ithuta* is actually the self reflexive form of *go ruta*. So “to study” in Setswana literally means “to teach oneself.”

Other changes:

i + r = th

nthekele = buy me (n + i-reka, see below)

i + d = it

itirela = work for oneself (from direla)

i + vowel = ik-vowel

ikutlwa = hear oneself

i + b = ip

ipona = see oneself (from bona)

Reflexive action verbs many times take the suffix *-ela* to indicate doing something to oneself. For example, *ntsholele* (serve me) takes *-ela* and then changes the final *a* to *e* to indicate a command (*n + tshola + ela = ntsholele* → *ntsholele*). The Setswana word for “I’m sorry” goes a similar route. It is the reflexive command form of *tshwara* (to catch/hold/restrain). So *intshwarele* is literally “restrain yourself from me” (*i + n + tshwara + ela = intshwarele* → *intshwarele*).

5.10 Noun Extensions

There are a few of these too, but not as many as with the verbs. To make a noun Familiar, add *-wee* to the end of a noun. It carries the meaning of “dear” in English:

Tshepo-wee, ke batla thuso ya gago = Tshepo dear, I want your help

To make a noun Locative:

Noun + -ng:

Ke tswa sekolong = I am from school
 Dijo di mo ntlong = The food is in the house
 O ile shopong = He went to the store
 Ke ya pitsing = I go to the place where the horse is

This doesn't apply to most proper place names like in the Ngunic languages (Mafikeng is the notable exception). It is used with common nouns to indicate location but has some odd twists (remember that $a + -ng = eng$). For example, when visiting a person, you don't add $-ng$ but you do add go :

Go + noun/pronoun:

Ke tswa ko go kgosi = I'm from the kgosi

But when talking about an office or place of work, you do add $-ng$:

Noun + -ng:

Ke dira ko Mapodising = I work at the police station
 Ke tswa ngakeng = I'm from the doctor's (place).

For the home of someone, however, you just need ga and don't add $-ng$:

Ga + noun:

Ke ya ko ga nkoko = I'm going to granny's home
 Ke ya fa ga ngaka = I'm going to the doctor's house

For a ward or district, just add goo :

Goo + noun:

Ke ya ko goo Bophimira = I'm going to Bophimira (District)

On a side note, here's a quick guide on various locatives:

Mo indicates that an action is affected *in, into, out of, on, or around* the area without reference to the distance.

Fa implies relative proximity (has meaning of *at, to, from* something close by) but is used less frequently.

Ko indicates relative distance (has meaning of *at, to, from*).

Kwa indicates a bit further than **ko** (also has meaning of *at, to, from* something at a distance, out of sight).

Ko and *kwa* are optional with the verbs *go ya* and *go tswa*. *Masimo* (fields) and *gae* (home) do not take the $-ng$ ending.

To make a noun Diminutive, add $-ana$ to the end of the noun.

Most nouns ending in $-a$ will just add $-na$:

peba → pebana

Many nouns ending in vowels can just drop the ending vowel and add *-ana*:

katse → katsana

Nouns ending in a soft consonant followed by a vowel will often add *-nyana*, although it can be added to almost any noun by retaining the final vowel:

bana → banyana braai → braainyana

For nouns ending in a hard consonant followed by a vowel, add *-tsana* (or *-tsane* or *-tswana*):

selepe → seletsana

Nouns ending in *i* can also add *-tsana* (or *-tsane* or *-tswana*):

koloi → kolotsana

pudi → potsane

Nouns ending in *-o* can add *-wana*:

leso → leswana

Nouns ending in *-ng* will add *-ngwana* (*ng + wana*):

dikgong → dikgongwana

Nouns ending in *-j* or *b* followed by a vowel will add *-jwana* (*j + wana*):

kolobe → kolojwana

Nouns ending in an “r” sound will add *-tshana*:

setlhare → setlhatshana

Nouns ending in *-ph* followed by a vowel will add *-tshwana*:

setlhophu → setlhotshwana

Nouns ending in *-f* followed by a vowel will also add *tshwana*:

lefifi → lefitshwana

Setswana is an oral language so the endings of the nouns tend to be what sounds the most fluent when spoken. As long as the ending sounds something “na” people should be able to understand. Unlike in Sesotho or the Nguni languages, there is no Augmentive form.

When the diminutive is added to non-countable items it takes on the meaning of “a little:”

metsi → metsanyana: a little water

bogobe → bogobenyana: a little bogobe

madi → madinyana: a little money

Chapter 6

Deepest Darkest Secrets

Despite the silly title, this chapter is sort of a catch-all for grammar topics that didn't fit nicely into other chapters, or more in-depth coverage of topics already covered. Some of it is head-spinningly obscure, but some is dead useful. I particularly recommend section 6.20 for some nut-and-bolts formulations.

6.1 Subjunctive Mood

The subjunctive expresses a dependent predicative mood. That means it indicates actions which are the result of other actions or events. The action or process expressed by the subjunctive verb is usually dependent on a preceding action or process. The resulting action must, however, be conditioned casually. It can also express an action or state as a visualized event and not as a reality. It also expresses doubts, wishes and imaginings and is frequently used in subordinate or consecutive constructions.

To form, change the verb ending to *e*:

Subject + participial + verb (ending in e):

O robale sentle = May you sleep well

Nthuse = Help me (please)

A thuse = He helps

Note that in the Subjunctive the 3rd person singular concord changes to *a*. The negative is:

Subject + concord + se + verb (ending in e):

O se robale sentle = May you not sleep well

A common way to use the subjunctive for a polite request is to add *a* to the beginning of the sentence. This gives it a meaning similar to "Let..." in English. Here's the formula:

A + subject + concord + verb (ending in e):

A re tsamaye = Let us go (commonly shortened to just “A re”)

A re thuse = Let us help (talking to one person or two)

A re thuseng = Let us help (talking to many people)

The negative is:

A + subject + concord + se + verb (ending in e):

A re se tsamaye = Let us not go

The Subjunctive can also take object concords:

A ke go thuse = Let me help you

A re se ba thuseng = Let's not help them

A re ye sekolong = Let's go to school

A re go bontshe dipudi = Let's show you the goats

The basic order of objects is as follows:

A + concord + (negative) + object concord + personal object concord + verb:

A re se di mo rekele = Let's not buy them (goats) for him

When two objects are used in a sentence, the one placed closest to the verb takes on a special emphasis:

A re se mo di rekele = Let's not buy them for him

A re se di mo rekele = Let's not buy them for him

A second verb can also be added following the Subjunctive in the usual way:

A + subject + concord + verb (-e) + go + 2nd verb (-a):

A ke go thuse go apaya = Let me help you cook

A re ye go bua le Thabo = Let's go talk to Thabo

A re leke go ba thusa go di kereya = Let's try to help them find them (cattle)

The Subjunctive can also provide a simple polite alternative to the imperative command, particularly for the 2nd person singular and plural (compare this to the Present Progressive Construction):

O je dijo tse = You should/must eat this food

O batle ditlhako tsa gago = You should/must look for your shoes

O se ye ko Kuruman = You shouldn't/musn't go to Kuruman

The negative is also used to carry the meaning of a request or exhortation. The main use of the Subjunctive is in “clauses of purpose” or intent that suggest something is to be done. These are normally triggered by the conjunction *gore* (so that, in order). For example:

Ke batla gore ba bereke beke e e tlang = I want them to work next week

Ke rata gore re ye ko tropong = I would like us to go to town

Ke mo kopile gore a mpone kamoso = I asked him to see me tomorrow

Another trigger of the Subjunctive is *gona le gore* (rather):

Gona le gore ke reke koloi, nka reka pitse = Rather than buy a car, I'd get a horse

The Subjunctive does not automatically follow *gore*. After verbs such as *itse*, *utlwa*, and *bona* the indicative mood is used because there is no evidence of an action that is caused by a preceding action. Also with *gore* it is possible to use *tle* to indicate future possibilities:

Gore + participial + tle + participial + verb (ending in e):

Ke nagana gore a tle a reke pitse = I think that he might buy a horse

The conjunction *gore* is not a necessity to introduce a subjunctive verb in a sentence:

Ke mmoleletse a latlhe selo se = I told him to throw away that thing

The other main trigger of the Subjunctive mood is when there are two commands in the same statement:

Imperative (-a) + (object) + concord + (object) + subjunctive (-e):

Tsamaya o mo thuse = Go and help him

Sela dipampiri o di latlhe = Pick up the papers and throw them away

Yet another trigger is *gongwe* (perhaps, maybe):

Gongwe ke bue nnete = Perhaps I may speak the truth

The Subjunctive mood can also be used to ask questions in response to something that has happened or been said concerning something that has to be done:

Ke eme? = Should I stand?

Go phephfatswe sengwe le sengwe? = Must everything be cleaned?

As stated above this mood also expresses wishes or requests:

A Modimo a go segofaste = May God bless you

6.2 Polite Imperative Mood

This mood is used to give polite commands and is formed using the subjunctive construction of the Potential Mood. It can be used as a nicer sounding alternative to the Hortative Mood. Here's the basic formula:

Subject + concord + ke/ko + participial + verb (ending in e):

This means “may” and is used to indicate something not yet decided. Like *bo* and *be*, *ke* and *ko* can be used interchangeably. For example:

Ke kê ke tsamaye = I may go (or I may not)
 Nkê ke tsamaye = I may go (or I may not)
 A o ko o bone = Please do see/Just have a look
 O kê o tsamaye = Don't leave (you)
 A le ke le mo thuse = Do help him (you all) please

Note that *ke kê* may also be *nkê*. *Kê* may be replaced with *tle* and *nkê* may be replaced with *ntle*. Adding the *a* in front of the phrase increases the strength of the plea. In the second person form, this turns a negative command into a declarative statement. It can also denote a question when used without the initial concord:

A kê re bow = Must we return

The negative is:

Subject + concord + ke/ko + se + verb (ending in e):

Nkê ke se tsamaye = I may not go

It is particularly useful in expressing requests with the 2nd person.

Ke or *nke* can also be used as an Auxiliary Verb to express the idea of “never” or “not” in the future (though more often this is formed using *e seng*, *le goka* or *ka gope*). Here's the formula:

Ga + participial + concord + ke/nke + participial + verb (ending in e with ke):

Ga nke ke ja mala mogodu = I never eat mala mogodu
 Ga a ise a ke a tle kwano = He has never yet come here

With *ke* the verb ending changes to *e* and *ise* is frequently added before (it gives the meaning of “not yet”).

6.3 Dependent Negative Future Tense

When used as an auxiliary verb and combines with the modified concord, it becomes another way to say “not” in the future tense. This can be a dependent statement (needing another clause to qualify your statement) or used independently. Here’s the formula:

Subject + concord + ke/ko + modified concord + verb:

Nke ke ka rata diboko tsa mopane = I shall never like mopane worms

O ke ke wa boa ko USA = You shall never go back to the USA

Note that this tense is similar in meaning to the ones above, but replaces the negative marker *ga* with the modified concord.

6.4 Optative Mood

This mood is actually a holdover from Sesotho. It is formed using the subjunctive form of the Sesotho verb “to be” (*ba/bile*). Even though Setswana doesn’t use the actual verb anymore (shame) they still use this part. The mood is formed with the help of an auxiliary verb plus the Participial. In the following moods, *be* and *bo* can be used interchangeably. Check your local dialect to find out which one is used. Most people will understand both however.

Present Tense formula:

Subject + concord + bo/be + participial + verb:

Ke bo ke ya ko Kuruman = I should go to Kuruman

Re be re siua = We should run away (instantly, immediately)

O be o leka gape = You should try again

Tshepo o bo a dira mmereko wa gagwe = Tshepo should do his work

A bo a reka bupi = He should buy cornflour

A ke be ke reka disweets? = Should I buy sweets?

Ba a bo ba reka = They are buying again

Ba a bo ba reka = They are buying then

Ba a bo ba reka = Then they are buying

E tshwanetse ya bo e fula = It ought to be grazing

O a bo o aka = You are probably lying

Note: this mood carries the approximate meaning of “should.” The negative is:

Subject + participial + bo/be + participial + sa + verb (ending in e):

A bo a sa reke bupi = He should not buy cornflour

For the Past and Future tense of this mood see the sections on the Future Continuous Tense and the Conditional Mood. For Sepedi speakers, this mood will appear to be exactly the same as the Past Continuous Tense so be careful when using it with them.

6.5 Future Continuous Tense

Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + verb (or le + place):

Kamoso ke tla be ke kgonna go tsamaya = Tomorrow I will be able to leave

Kamoso bana ba tla be ba lwala = Tomorrow children will be sick

Bosigo Thabo o tla be a le fa = Tonight Thabo will be here

Ke tlaa bo ke reka = I shall be in the process of buying

Ba tlaa bo ba remile = They will by then have chopped

Beke e tlang ke tla be ke le ko Morongwa = Next week I will be at Morongwa)

This tense means approximately “will be” and is used for events in the future which are not assured of happening. The negative formula is:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + sa + verb (ending in e):

O tla bo a sa reke bupi = You won't be buying bupi

For using the Future Continuous to talk about a past event (Future in the Past), see the Conditional Mood section, to follow as soon as I've finished this banana. Ah, that's better.

6.6 Conditional Mood

The Conditional mood as described here is actually the Perfect tense of the Potential mood. It is related to the Optative and is frequently used when there is a contra-positive to be mentioned or described. It translates as “might” or “would” in English. All these are dependent clauses, meaning they need another statement to qualify them.

6.6.1 Present Tense

Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + ka + bo/be + participial + verb:

This carries the approximate meaning of may, might, could, ought (when doing something instead of doing what you should) or were. Some examples:

Ke ka bo ke ya Tsoe = I might go to Tsoe

Nka bo ke ya Tsoe = I might go to Tsoe

Go ja nka bo = to steal and eat on the sly

Fa nka bo... = If I might...

O ka be o tlhatswa dipoleite = He ought to wash the dishes

Ba ka bo ba kweetsa koloi = They could drive the car

Fa o ka bo o le lekolwane la me... = If you were my boyfriend...
(sigh)

Fa ke ka bo ke tsamaya ko Cape Town... = If I were going to Cape Town...

Re ka bo re reka = We would/should/ought to be buying

Ke tlile ka go o mpititse = I came because you called me

Ke ka bo ke reka = I bought at that point

Like in the Subjunctive, to mean "to be" add *le* after participial for positive, *sa* for negative. The formula is:

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e):

O ka bo a sa reke bupi = You might not buy bupi

Like in the Present Continuous, *bo* and *be* are interchangeable. Check your local dialect to find out which one is in use. Again, most people will understand both.

6.6.2 Past Continuous Tense

Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + verb:

Nkabo ke ne ke batla = I would have been looking for

Ba ka bo ba ne ba reka = They would have been buying

O ka be a ne a dira = She would have been doing

The negative is:

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + sa + verb (-e):

Nkabo ke ne ke sa batle = I would not have been looking for

Ba ka bo ba ne ba sa reke = They wouldn't have been buying

O ka be a ne a sa dire = She wouldn't have been doing

The reverse is also possible. This tense can also be formed with the Conditional preceding the Past Continuous:

Subject + concord + ne + participial + ka + bo/be + concord + verb:

Ke ne ke ka bo ke tsamaya ko Kuruman = I could have gone to Kuruman

Lerato o ne a ka be e le ngaka fa a ithutile thata = Lerato could have been a doctor if she had studied hard

The negative is:

Subject + concord + ne + participial + ka bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e):

O ne a ka bo a sa reke bupi = He could not have bought bupi

6.6.3 Future Tense

The future Conditional is the same as the present. The Conditional is frequently used with conjunctions such as *fa* (if) and *fale* (even if). For example:

Lefa Thabo a ka ya Mafikeng a ka se bone Lorato = Even if Thabo goes to Mafikeng he can't see Lorato

Fa re ka sa ithute Setswana re ka bua sekgoa = If we can't learn Setswana we must speak English

Fa ba ka bo ba gorogile re ka bo re ba bona = If they would have arrived we would be seeing them

Fa ba ka bo ba ne ba gorogile re ka bo re ba bone = If they had arrived we would have seen them

6.6.4 Past Perfect Tense

There are two different ways of forming this tense, one using the Past Perfect form of the verb and another using the Past Continuous form. They both have roughly similar meaning.

1. Past Perfect:

**Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial
+ verb (past/perfect tense):**

Nka bo ke ne ke batlile = I would have looked for
Ba ka bo ba ne ba rekile = They would have bought
O ka be a ne a dirile = She would have done

An alternative way to form this tense is:

**Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + verb
(past/perfect tense):**

Nka bo ke dirile = I would have done
Kka be ke ile ko Kuruman = I was supposed to go to Kuruman
Ba ka bo ba dirile = They should have done
Neo o ka bo a robetse = Neo wouldn't have slept

The negative is:

**Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial
+ sa + verb:**

Nkabo ke ne ke sa batla = I would not have looked for
Ba ka bo ba ne ba sa reka = They wouldn't have bought
O ka be a ne a sa dira = She wouldn't have done

Note that the only difference between the two negative forms is the ending of the verb.

2. Past Continuous:

Subject + concord + ne + participial + tla + concord + verb:

Ke ne ke tla ke bala fa ke na le buka = I would be able to read
if I had a book
Thabang o ne a tla a ya sekolo fa o ka patela "fees" = Thabang
would be able to go to school if he could pay the fees

You can also eliminate the second concord to form without changing the meaning. This is merely a dialectical variation.

Subject + concord + ne + participial + tla + verb:

Ke ne ke tla rata go dira sengwe kamoso fela ke na le mereko o
montsi = I would like to do something tomorrow but I have a
lot of work

The negative for both is:

**Ga + subject + concord + ne + participial + kitla + concord
+ verb:**

Ga ke ne ke kitla ke ithuta Setswana = I wouldn't be able to
study Setswana

Note that the Conditional can be used with the Potential, Future or Conditional moods in the same sentence depending in the desired meaning.

6.7 Future in the Past Tense

This mood is also dependent and is usually used if something was going to happen (or would have happened) but was prevented from happening by something else (like, for example, you ran out of plutonium). Here's the formula:

**Subject + concord + ne + participial + tla bo/be + concord +
verb:**

Ke ne ke tla bo ke tsamaya ko Kuruman = I would have gone to
Kuruman

Thabo o ne a tla bo o tlhatlhela dipudi = Thabo was going to herd
the goats

The negative is:

**Subject + concord + ne + participial + se + kitla + participial +
verb:**

O ne o se kitla o nna mokgwetsi = You weren't going to be a driver

Instead of using *nna* to mean "to be" add *le* after the last concord for positive and *se* for negative. Note that this does not use *ka bo* and is rather a derivative of the Future Continuous Tense.

If this is all too confusing, see the Other Verb Forms section for a simple alternative using *go batlile*. Remember that the Conditional can be used with the Potential, Future or Conditional moods in the same sentence depending in the desired meaning.

6.8 Hortative Mood

The Hortative mood is used when you want to exhort someone to do something. It is used to express plea, insistence, imploring, encouragement, wish, desire, urging, or intent. It is less forceful than a command, but more forceful than using the subjunctive. Sometimes it is translated as "please" but its meaning

is slightly different. Note that it is OK to use with peers or younger people but disrespectful to use with elders or persons of authority (i.e. the *Kgosi*). For those people, it is better to use *go kopa*. The formula is:

Verb stem + tlhe:

Dula tlhe = Sit

Nthuse tlhe = Help me

Tlang kwano tlhe = Come here (you all)

Note that the verb ending does not change. To make plural, add *-ng* to the end of the verb. The negative is:

Se + verb (ending in e) + tle:

Se dule tle = Don't sit

6.9 Imperative Mood

This mood is used when you want to give commands, both positive and negative. For more examples see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*, p. 37. To one person:

Verb stem + object:

Bidisa metsi = Boil water

Tlhatswa dijana = Wash the dishes

Dula fatshe fa= Sit down here

The root of the verb (stem) is just the infinitive of the verb without *go*. To many people:

Verb root + -ng + object:

Tlisang dipampiri = Bring the papers (you all)

Kwalang mafoko ao = Write those words

Balang dibuka = Read the books

The imperative can be preceded by a personal object to clarify the reference of the command. The ending of the imperative will change from *-a* to *-e* and the verb will often (but not always) take the *-ela* extension:

Mo fe = Give him

Re thuse = Help us

Nthekele = Buy me (n + reka + ela)

The negative for both is:

Se + verb root (ending in e) + object

Se bule dibuka = Don't open the books

Se tle kwano = Don't come here

Se jeseng diphologolo = Don't feed the animals

An alternative formation is

Concord (o/le) + seka + modified concord + verb:

O seka wa tima TV = Don't turn off the TV

Le seka la bua sepe = Don't say anything (you all)

O seka wa ja nama ya tonki = Don't eat donkey meat

Lo seka la sutla faele = Don't delete the file

In spoken Setswana, *seka* is frequently contracted to *ska* and the modified concord is left out:

Concord (o/le) + ska + verb:

O ska tima TV = Don't turn off the TV

Le ska bua sepe = Don't say anything (you all)

O ska ja nama eo = Don't eat that meat

Lo ska sutla faele = Don't delete the file

A second object can be added in front of the personal objects *n-*, *mo*, *re*, and *ba*:

Se mphe = Give it to me (selepe)

O ska a ba adima = Don't lend it to him (magwena)

Be careful when using this, as it can make you seem demanding and impolite if used inappropriately. As a general rule, it is not to be used with elders or figures of authority (like the *Kgosi*).

6.10 Setswana Command Continuum

So by now you've realized that Setswana has a lot of ways of asking for something. Here's a basic ranking of the varying command forms by decreasing level of politeness (meaning most polite first):

Ke (a) kopa: Ke kopa go adima buka

Tswee tswee: Ke adima buka tswee tswee

Subjunctive: Nkadime buka

Polite Imperative: A nke ke adime buka

Optative: O be o nkadime buka

Hortative: Nkadime buka tlhe

Imperative: Nkadime buka

Please note that this is only for grammar. Tone of voice, body language, and any curse words inserted will alter the nature of the request. For example:

Tswana Tsotsi: *A o ke o nkadime madi kgotsa ke tla kgaola molala wa gago.*

(This is based on an old joke about the difference between a Tswana tsotsi and a Zulu tsotsi. Ask a local for an explanation.)

6.11 Habitual Mood

This mood is formed with the subjunctive of tla and used for things that are usually, habitually or sometimes done. It takes the place of the adverb “usually.”

Subject + concord + tle + participial + verb (ending in e):

Ba tle ba leme = They usually plow

The negative is:

Subject + ga + concord + ke + participial + verb:

Ga ba ke ba bua = They do not usually talk

6.12 Consecutive Mood

This mood is used when one action happens right after another (and usually depends on it). It is formed with the Optative mood:

Subject + concord + verb (1) + concord + bo/be + participial + verb (2):

Batho ba jele ba bo ba robala = The people ate and then they slept

Note that the first verb is in the past tense, to indicate that it happened before the second action, which stays in the present even though we make both verbs in the past tense in English.

6.13 Past Continuous (Imperfect) Tense

In contrast to the simple past tense, this tense carries the approximate meaning of “was/were + ing” in English. Sometimes it is referred to as the Imperfect tense. It signifies that an action was continuing to take place at a given point in the past. It can also serve as an easy substitute for the simple past if you can’t remember how to conjugate the specific verb you want. This tense is also covered in the *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* book (p. 65).

1st Person	ke ne ke	re ne re
2nd Person	o ne o	le ne le
3rd Person/Class 1	o ne a	ba ne ba
Class 2	o ne o	e ne e (le)
Class 3	le ne le	a ne a
Class 4	se ne se	di ne di
Class 5	e ne e (le)	di ne di
Class 6	lo ne lo	di ne di
Class 7	bo ne bo	a ne a
Class 8	go ne go	

Table 6.1: A positive Past Continuous breakdown.

Subject + concord + ne + participial + verb:

Ke ne ke dira tiro yaka = I was doing my work

O ne o mpotsa = You were asking me

Moagi o ne a aga = The builder was building

This tense is formed by the use of the helping verb *ne* followed by the Present Participial of the noun (the same as the concord except *a*). The only exception to this is God (the cheeky bugger):

Modimo o ne o thusa batho = God was helping the people

For everything else, follow Table 6.1:

Note that sometimes *ne* may become *na* or *no* before *a* and *o*. In some places *e ne e* may be followed by *le* regardless of the verb proceeding it.

The negative is formed with the negative participial *sa*:

Subject + concord + ne + participial + sa + verb (ending in e):

Ke ne ke sa bereke = I wasn't working

O ne a sa pega dilo = She was not picking up things

Kgosi e ne e sa nwe bojalwa = The chief was not drinking beer

Note that the *sa* → *se* when used with *na le*:

O ne o se na madi = You did not have money

This tense may also be contracted, omitting the first concord and *ne*:

Ga la fetsa tirogae = You didn't finish your homework

One way to form the future negative tense (Rustenberg version?) is to add *ga* before the Past Continuous Positive Tense. For other regional variants, see the Future Negative Tense Section.

1st Person	ke ne ke sa	re ne re sa
2nd Person	o ne o sa	le ne le sa
3rd Person/Class 1	o ne a sa	ba ne ba sa
Class 2	o ne o sa	e ne e sa
Class 3	le ne le sa	a ne a sa
Class 4	se ne se sa	di ne di sa
Class 5	e ne e sa	di ne di sa
Class 6	lo ne lo sa	di ne di sa
Class 7	bo ne bo sa	a ne a sa
Class 8	go ne go sa	

Table 6.2: A negative Past Continuous breakdown.

Subject + ga + concord + ne + participial + verb:

Ga ke ne ke ya = I won't go

Ga re ne re fetsa gompiano = We will not finish today

Kgosi ga e ne e tla kamoso = The chief won't come tomorrow

Mpho ga a ne a bona Thabo kamoso = Mpho won't see Thabo tomorrow

6.14 Comparison between Perfect and Past Continuous Tense

The exact translation of the perfect tense is usually rendered as “has/have + past participial:”

Ke rekile dijo = I have bought food

Ke bone dipotos = I have seen the photos

O berekile = He has worked

But in some places it will be translated the as the simple past tense in English:

Ke gorogile fa mabaane = I arrived here yesterday

As a general rule it is safe to employ the perfect to express an action in the past unless a more recent action has occurred which completes the action or terminates its significance. In many instances the two can be used interchangeably:

Ke rekile selepe mabaane = I bought the axe yesterday

reka selepe mabaane = I bought the axe yesterday

In certain circumstances different nuances of meaning might be derived from the variation in verb tense, but the two sentences are essentially the same. The essential difference between the two tenses is demonstrated by whether or not the “state” resulting from the verb action or event continues to exist.

John o robetse maitseboa = John (has) slept in the afternoon

John o ne a robala maitseboa = John slept (was sleeping) in the afternoon

In the first example, one would probably assume that John was still asleep. In the second, the use of the past continuous tense clarifies that John slept but is now awake (John was sleeping).

Neo o ile Kuruman = Neo went to Kuruman (Neo has gone to Kuruman)

In this case we would assume that Neo was in Kuruman, or at least had not returned from town yet.

Neo o ne a ya Kuruman = Neo went to Kuruman (Neo was going to Kuruman)

This indicates that Neo is no longer in Kuruman. In both examples where the Past Continuous Tense has been used the “state” resulting from the action of the verb has ceased to exist (i.e., John slept, but is not sleeping now; Neo went to Kuruman, but is not there now). When using the Past Continuous Tense it is assumed that significance of the actions or events described have been superseded by more recent events or actions.

6.15 Past “Perfect” Tense Conversions

You should already know about the Past “Perfect” Tense (it was the first past tense that we learned). It is used to refer to things in the past and is usually translated to English as “has/have + past participial:”

Ke dirile tirogae = I have done the homework

O berekile thata = He has worked hard

Before, we said the best way to learn this tense is to simply memorize every verb, but there are actually some rules underlying its formation, depending on the verb being conjugated. They fall into several categories based on the ending of the particular verb. This is useful as a reference, but after a bit of practice you should have developed a feel for how it should sound.

6.15.1 In General:

Verbs ending in *-a* drop *-a* or *-ya* and add *-ile* (sometimes $a \rightarrow e$)

dira → dirile
 araba → arabile
 tsamaya → tsamaile
 baya → beile

6.15.2 Other Endings:

- ala → etse
 - ola → otse
 - isa → isitse
 - sa → sitse
 - tsa → ditse
 -tswa → tswitse
 - nya → ntse
 - na → nye/nne
 - ara → ere
 - la → tse (when *a* proceeds the *-la* it changes to *e*: robala → robetse)
 - tla → tlile (*tl* is considered one letter)
 -otla → odile (+2 syllable verbs ending in *-la* usually change *l* into *d* then add *-ile*)

6.15.3 Irregular Verbs

apara → apere (to dress)
 apaya → apeile (to cook)
 bala → badile (to read)
 baya → beile (to put/place)
 ema → eme (to stand/wait)
 gadika → gadikile (to fry) (Editor’s Note: Doesn’t look irregular to me with the LCF change.)
 itse → itsitse (to know)
 ja → jele (to eat)
 kgora → kgotse (to be full)
 lela → lelile/llile (to cry)
 lwa → lwele (to fight)
 na le → ne (to have: *na le* → *na* in the negative present tense)
 nna → ntse (to be)

palama → palame (to climb/board)
 re → rile (to say: *re* stays the same in the negative present tense)
 thatafatsa → thutafatse (to make warm)
 tsidifatsa → tsidifetse (to make cold)
 thaloganya → thalogantse (to understand)
 tlhatswa → tlhatswitse (to wash)
 tsaya → tsere (to catch/take)
 tshwara → tshwere (to hold)
 tswa → dule/tswile/tsole (to be from, emerge)
 ya → ile (to go)

See the Verb List Appendix for a list of commonly used verbs and their Past “Perfect” Tense conversions.

Note that verbs that express emotions, conditions and states of being are formed in the Past “Perfect” Tense even if they are happening in the present:

Ke lapile = I am tired
 Ba robetse = They are asleep
 O ntse fatshe = He is sitting down
 Pene e robegile = The pen is broken

6.16 Alternative Forms of the Negative Past Tense

There are a few additional ways of forming the Negative Past Tense not mentioned previously in this manual. They seem to be holdovers from Sepedi, and since some volunteers work in linguistically mixed communities we have included them here as a resource.

1. This form follows the format:

Ga se + modified concord + verb (-a) + object noun

Notice that the verb ends in *-a* just like it does in positive sentences. We use a modified concord instead of a regular one. Basically we replace the *-e* ending of the pronoun with an *-a*. For example, in the first person singular, it goes *ke* → *ka*. See Table 6.3 for the details. Similarly all the major noun classes also have modified concords, laid out for you in Table 6.4.

Don’t worry about memorizing the tables, just practice using them to gain fluency.

English	Normal Concord	Modified Concord
I	Ke	Ka
You	O	Wa
He/She	O	A
We	Re	Ra
You all	Le	Lwa
They	Ba	Ba

Table 6.3: Additional Negative Past Tense the first.

NC	Prefix		Normal Concord		Modified Concord	
	Sing.	Plu.	Sing	Plu.	Sing.	Plu.
1	Mo	Ba	o	ba	wa	ba
2	Mo	Me	o	e	wa	ya
3	Le	Ma	le	a	la	a
4	Se	Di	se	di	sa	tse
5	N*	Di	e	di	ya	tse
6	Lo	Di	lo	di	lwa	tse
7	Bo	Ma	bo	a	ba	a
8	Go		Go		Ga	

Table 6.4: Additional Negative Past Tense the first, continued.

Ga ke a reka dijo = I didn't buy food
 Mpho ga a robala = Mpho didn't sleep
 Ga re a ja bogobe = We didn't eat pap
 Ga lo a batla go ithuta = You-all didn't want to learn

2. This one is simpler. It is exactly the same as the present negative tense except that you add *se* after *ga* (and $o \rightarrow a$ in third person singular):

Ga se + participial + verb-e + object noun:

Ga se ke apaye nama ya kgokgo = I didn't cook chicken
 Ga se a rute = She didn't teach
 Ga se le bone = You-all didn't see

3. Yet another way to form the Negative Past Tense:

Ga + participial + a ka + modified concord + verb:

Ga ke a ka ka bona = I didn't see
 Ga o a ka wa bona = You didn't see
 Ga a a ka a bona = He didn't see
 Ga di a ka tsa bona = They (the cows) didn't see

Check with your community to see which method is used most often (if any).

6.17 Past Definite (Narrative) Tense

This tense is related to the Past Continuous tense and describes actions and events that occurred and were completed at a point of time in the past. A form of the Past Definite (the Narrative sub-tense) is especially used for storytelling. It is formed like the Past Continuous tense, only with the Modified Concord (Possessive Linking Pronoun) in place of the Participial. Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + ne + modified concord + verb:

Ke ne ka bua = I did speak
 O ne a ya = He did go
 O ne wa botsa = You did ask

For a comparison between the formation of the Past Continuous and Past Definite tenses, please refer to Table 6.5.

Remember to form the modified concord, take the regular concord and add *a* to the end. Because of vowel elision (contraction in speech and writing), they change to the form in the above table. For more on this, see the second Appendix.

Noun Class	Past Continuous		Past Definite	
	Singular	Plural	Singular	Plural
1st Person	ke ne ke	re ne re	ke ne ka	re ne ra
2nd Person	o ne o	le ne le	o ne wa	le ne la
3rd Person/Class 1	o ne a	ba ne ba	o ne a	ba ne ba
Class 2	o ne o	e ne e	o ne wa	e ne ya
Class 3	le ne le	a ne a	le ne la	a ne a
Class 4	se ne se	di ne di	se ne sa	di ne tsa
Class 5	e ne e	di ne di	e ne ya	di ne tsa
Class 6	lo ne lo	di ne di	lo ne lwa	di ne tsa
Class 7	bo ne bo	a ne a	bo ne ba	a ne a
Class 8	go ne go		go ne ga	

Table 6.5: A comparison between Past Continuous and Past Definite tenses.

These are also the same as the Possessive Pronouns. The one exception to this is with the 3rd Person /Noun Class 1. It is identical to the Past Continuous Tense (singular: *o ne a* and plural: *ba ne ba*).

The negative of this tense is:

Subject + concord + ne + modified concord + se ka + modified concord + verb:

Maburu a ne a se ka a nna teng = The Afrikaners don't live here

Dikgosi di ne tsa se ka tsa gana = The chiefs did not refuse

Ke ne ka se ka ka ya Pretoria = I didn't go to Pretoria

Ryan here again, just with a quick spelling note. English speakers are bizarrely prone to misspelling **Afrikaner** as “Afrikaaner.” Remember, **Afrikaans** is the language, or can be increasingly used to refer to the people due to the negative connotations of “Afrikaner.” Just remember, if you slap that “-er” on the end, it's one a. Mostly a silly pet peeve, but it does matter because (unlike some other languages I could mention), Afrikaans is phonetic. Now back to your regularly scheduled programming.

Here the modified concord is used twice, once in its original position and once after the negative indicator *seka*. The verb does not change, unlike in the Past Continuous Tense. To better understand this tense used in context, read the story below and note the use of the Past Definite Tense.

Dineo o re bolelela leinanne le o le utlwileng gompiano ko sekolong.
 “E rile letsatsi lengwe go ne ga le mosadi a na le dikgomo tse dintle.
 Dikgomo di ne di fula bojang ko nageng fa moloi o ne a di utswa.
 Mosadi o ne a senka dikgomo gongwe le gonwe mme o ne a se ka di bona...”

Note that in some places the *ne* can be replaced with *ile* or *kile*:

Subject + concord + ile/kile + modified concord + verb:

Ke kile ka ya Gauteng = I had gone to Gauteng

Ke kile ka nna morutabana = I had been a teacher

Ke ile ka ya Mafikeng = I did go to Mafikeng

O ile wa bua Sekgoa = You did speak English

E kile ya re... = Once upon a time... (It used to be said...)

When telling a story, or using a series of verbs and sentences talking about actions that took place in the past, the Narrative Form is used. The Narrative form is a shorter, easier way to write the Past Definite Tense:

Subject (implied) + modified concord + verb

Ke ne ka ya Mafikeng ka khumbi. Ka tsamaya fela ka goroga lata.

Khumbi ya robega, ya thula tonki. Tonki ya swa. Ka nna fela mo tseleng. Kgantele khumbi e sele ya tla. Ka palama khumbi e ntswa gape. Ka tla bosigo ko Mafikeng.

After the first sentence establishing the use of the Past Definite, you can change to the Narrative form. Note that as long as you continue in the Past Definite tense, even if you change subjects, you can keep use the shorter Narrative Form. However if you interrupt your timeline, and later you switch back you must start again with the Past Definite tense proper to reestablish the timeline. In deep Setswana this is often used in place of the Perfect tense to indicate that an action occurred sometime in the past (ie as the simple past tense in English). For more examples see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 78.

6.18 Perfect Verb Tenses

These are just some extra verb tenses that aren't included in other grammar books.

6.18.1 Past Perfect

Carries the approximate meaning of "had + participial" (had done, etc., also sometimes called the Pluperfect tense).

Subject + concord + ne + participial + verb (past/perfect tense):

Ke ne ke batlile dijo = I had wanted dijo

O ne a berekile thata = He had worked a lot

Basadi ba ne ba rokile = The women had sewn

The negative is the same as the Past Continuous negative. Note that this has roughly the same meaning as the Past Narrative Tense.

6.18.2 Future Perfect

Here's the formula:

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + verb (past/perfect tense):

Ba tla bo ba rekile = They will (by then) have bought

The negative is the same as the future negative.

6.18.3 Present Perfect

The Present Perfect does not exist in Setswana. (Hah, sucker!) You can approximate its meaning by using "still." (See the Other Verb Forms section for details.)

6.19 Alternative Future Negative Tense Formations

Here are some more ways to form the future negative tense. Check with your community to see which is used.

Subject + ga + concord (participial) + na go + verb:

Dijo ga di na go jewa = The food will not be eaten

Lisa le Mary ga ba na go reka dijo = Lisa and Mary will not buy food

Baithuti ga ba na go ithuta = The learners will not study

Ga ke na go rapela ka moso = I will not pray tomorrow

Ga a na go apaya ka moso = He will not cook tomorrow

Subject + ga + concord + ka ke + modified concord + verb:

Ga nka ke ka dira jalo = I won't do that

Setlhare ga se ka ke sa robega = The tree won't break

Bogobe ga bo ka ke ba butswa = The pap will not be ready

Subject + ga + concord + ne + participial + verb:

Ga ke ne ke ya = I won't go

Ga re ne re fetsa gompiano = We will not finish today

Kgosi ga e ne e tla kamoso = The chief won't come tomorrow

Subject + concord + palelwa + go + verb:

Ke palelwa ke go dira tiro ya me = I won't do my work (I fail to do my work)

O tla palelwa ke go ya ko tropong gompiano = You won't go to town today

6.20 Other Verb Forms

Setswana is a rich language, and in addition to the standard tenses there are many other ways to say things. Here are some common English phrasings and their Setswana equivalents. Some are simply verbs, others are more complicated constructions that make use of helping or auxiliary (deficient) verbs but do not fit neatly into any of the categories previously discussed.

6.20.1 Can and Can't - expressing ability

Subject + concord + kgona + go + verb:

Ga ke kgone go bua Setswana = I am not able to speak Setswana

Ke kgona go bua Setswana = I am able to speak Setswana

It is impolite to directly refuse someone in Setswana (*go gana*) so many times people use *ga ke kgone* instead. This verb can also be combined with the Potential mood:

O ka kgona go dira jalo = You can be able to do this (You have the potential to be able to do this)

6.20.2 Have To.../Need to...

Subject + concord + tshwanetse + participial/modified concord/go + 2nd verb:

Ke tshwanetse ke ithute Setswana = I should study Setswana

O tshwanetse go dira sengwe = You should do something

Maburu a tshwanetse go re patela "reparations" = The Afrikaners should pay us reparations

This is the past tense of *go tshwanela* and is used regardless of the time an action is taking place. It is followed by *go* except in the first person *ke* (although in some dialects it will be followed by the participial or the modified concord of the subject noun). When using it as the 2nd verb in a sentence, however, make it in the present tense. You can either follow *tshwanetse* with *go* or the concord again to link it to the second verb.

Go tshwanetse go apara baki ko kerekeng = It would be appropriate to wear a jacket to church

O batla go tshwanela go nna Kgosi = He wants to be worthy to be the Chief

Another way to use *tshwanetse* is with the past continuous tense and the Progressive Construct. It translates roughly as “should have been...”

Subject + concord + ne + participial + tshwanetse + concord + bo/be + participial + verb (past tense):

Ke ne ke tshwanetse ke be ke dirile... = I should have been doing...

O ne o tshwanetse o be o nnile ko Kuruman = You should have been (staying) in Kuruman

As a bit of advice, you can never go wrong by just adding another concord.

6.20.3 Was going to (Wanted to)

Subject + concord + batlile go + verb:

Ke batlile go dira tiro ya me mme ke lapile = I was going to do my work but I was tired.

This may be easier to remember than the more complicated Conditional or Progressive moods.

6.20.4 Almost

Subject + concord + batlile + participial + verb (present tense):

Ke batlile ke lebala = I almost forgot

6.20.5 Going to...

Subject + concord + tlile + go + verb:

Ke tlile go apaya = I am going to cook

Or:

Subject + tlo (tlile + go) + verb:

Ba tlo tshameka = They are going to play/They will have to play

The negative is the same as the future negative.

6.20.6 Going to... (2)**Ke ya go → Ko:**

Ke ya go rota → Ko rota = I'm going to pee

6.20.7 Was going to be -ing**Subject + concord + ne + participial + tlile + go + verb:**

Ke ne ke tlile go bereka gompino mme ke tshaisitse = I was going to be working today but I knocked off early

6.20.8 Already...**Subject + concord + setse + participial + past tense verb. :**

Ke setse ke tlhpile = I already bathed

O setse a bone bana = He already saw the children

Bana ba setse ba tlile = The children already came

To use as a conjunction, see the Conjunctions section.

6.20.9 Remained/Stayed (somewhere)**Subject + concord + setse + mo/ko/kwa + place:**

Ke setse mo ntlong = I remained in the house

O setse ko morago = He remained behind

Ba setse mo sekolong = The remained in school

This is the past tense of *go sala*.**6.20.10 Still...**

Present tense:

Subject + concord + santse + participial + verb:

O santse a siana = He is still running

Ke santse ke opela = I am still singing

Bana ba santse ba tshameka = The children are still playing

Dikoko di santse di loma = The chickens are still biting

Past tense:

Subject + ne + participial + santse + concord + verb:

O ne a santse a siana = He was still running

Ke ne ke santse ke opela = I was still singing

Bana ba ne ba santse ba tshameka = The children were still playing

Dikoko di ne di santse di loma = The chickens were still biting

Future tense:

Subject + concord + tla be/bo + participial + santse + concord + verb:

O tla be a santse a siana = He will still be running

Ke tla be ke santse ke opela = I will still be singing

Bana ba tla be ba santse ba tshameka = The children will still be playing

Dikoko di tla be di santse di loma = The chickens will still be biting

Another way to form “still” is with *sa* alone or *sa le*:

Subject + concord + sa/sale + verb:

O sa reka = He is still buying

Ke sa tsamaya = I am still traveling

O sa le fano = He is still here

Yet another way is just with *ntse* and the long present:

Subject + concord + ntse + participial + a + verb:

Ke ntse ke a roka = I am continuing to sew

By adding *fa* in front you can form a clause similar to “as” in English:

Fa + participial + ntse + participial + verb (ending in e):

Fa a ntse a siane... = As he was running

6.20.11 Not Yet

Ga + participial + ise + participial + verb (ending in e):

Ga ke ise ke reke = I have not yet bought

Ga ba ise ba goroge = They have not yet arrived

Ga re ise re dire se re tshwanetseng go se dira = We have not yet done what we should have done

6.20.12 Used to... (Past Tense)

Subject + concord + kile + modified concord + be/bo + participial + verb:

Nkile ka bo ke rata bana = I used to like children.

O kile wa bo o eta = You used to visit.

Lesego o kile a bo a apaya = She used to cook.

Re kile ra bo re ya toropong = We used to go to town.

Le kile la bo le bereka thata = You (all) used to work hard.

Bana ba kile ba bo ba tshameka = Children used to play.

Ditonki di kile tsa bo di siana = Donkeys used to run.

Sefofane se kile sa bo se fofa = The plane used to fly.

This is a combination of the Past Narrative Tense and the Optative Mood.

6.20.13 While...

Positive:

... ka/fa + participial + verb + object:

... fa ke bua nnete = ... while I speak the truth

Negative:

... ka/fa + participial + sa + verb (-e) + object:

... fa a sa bua nnete = while he/she doesn't speak the truth

Another way to form the same meaning is with *ya re*:

... ya re + participial + sa + verb + object:

...ya re ke sa bua nnete = ... while I don't speak the truth

6.20.14 Just

Subject + ile + participial + verb + object:

O ile a palama teksi = He just boarded the taxi

Another way to form the same meaning is with *ke gone* and the gerund *-ng*:

Ke gone + concord + verb (-ng) + object:

Ke gone o gorogang mono = He just arrived here

6.21 “Strong” Adjectives (Relative Constructions)

These have already been discussed in the Beginning section (or see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 59), but there are a few extra things I want to add here. The “strong” adjectives are used more frequently in Setswana than their corresponding clauses are in English. They are frequently used when a verb is the modifier. Consult Table 6.6 for the details of one form of construction.

6.21.1 Direct Relative Construction

Perspective/NC	Singular	Plural
1st person	yo ke	ba re
2nd person	yo o	ba lo / ba le
3rd person/Class 1	yo o / o o	ba ba
Class 2	o o	ba ba
Class 3	le le	e e
Class 4	se se	a a
Class 5	e e	tse di
Class 6	lo lo	tse di
Class 7	bo bo	a a
Class 8	mo go	

Table 6.6: The Direct Relative Construction

To use a verb as a modifier, add *-ng* to the end of the verb:

Subject + relative construction + verb -ng:

Bana ba ba robetsang ga ba kitla ba tsamaya le rona = The children who are sleeping won't go with us

Ke batla monna yo o nang le dikgomo = I want a man who has cows

Depending on the dialect the 3rd person plural/Class 1 may utilize one of two different constructions. They are all equal in meaning.

Mosadi yo o botlhale o bala Setswana = The wise woman reads Setswana

Mosadi o o botlhale o bala Setswana = The wise woman reads Setswana

When used with Noun Class 8 (infinitives), the *mo* is only necessary when part of a true adjectival clause within a larger sentence. Otherwise the *mo* is omitted.

Go apaya mo go monate go kae? = Where is the delicious cooking

Go apaya go monate = The cooking is delicious

To get technical, the Relative Construct can be divided into two parts. The first word or part is actually the 1st person demonstrative pronoun (indicating this) and the second part is the connecting concord. This is important to know for the IRC.

6.21.2 Indirect Relative Construction

The difference between the Direct Relative Construction you already know and the Indirect one is that in the DRC, the noun being described is the subject of the construction that follows it, whereas in the IRC it is not:

Neo o rata dipudi tse ke di rekeleng = Neo likes the goats that I bought

The concord for the new subject is inserted in between the two components of the IRC as shown below (which are the demonstrative pronoun and object pronoun respectively). See Table 6.7 for the details.

Perspective/NC	Singular	Plural
1st person	yo/ke	ba/re
2nd person	yo/o	ba/le
3rd person/Class 1	yo/mo	ba/ba
Class 2	o/o	ba/ba
Class 3	le/le	e/e
Class 4	se/se	a/a
Class 5	e/e	tse/di
Class 6	lo lo	tse/di
Class 7	bo/bo	a/a
Class 8	mo/go	

Table 6.7: The Indirect Relative Construction.

To form the IRC, use the independent clause of the sentence as normal and add:

Demonstrative pronoun + 2nd subject + 2nd subject participial + object pronoun + verb (-ng):

Ke bona monna yo Neo a mo itseng = I see the man that Neo knows

O kwadile lekwalo le ke le fitlhetseng = You wrote the letter I found

Ba itse monna yo ke tla mmonang kamoso = They know the man I will see tomorrow

Note that the only difference between the DRC and IRC concords is the 3rd person singular, which changes from the object concord *o* to the reflexive object pronoun *mo* and follows all subsequent rules for *mo*. Also, *ke* is used in place of the reflexive object pronoun prefix *n-*.

The DP introduces the construction and may be followed by the noun or the subject concord of the noun that is the subject of the construction. The object is next and must always be used in this pattern. Any additional objects follow and finally the verb stem with *-ng* ending. The participial must be used with the Indirect Relative Construction.

6.22 Demonstrative (Relative) Pronouns

These have already been discussed in the opening chapters. Demonstrative pronouns answer the question “which one?” (they specify the object) and are used to give the distance of an object being talked about from the speaker. In English there are two types: this and that for singular and these and those for plurals. In Setswana there are four different types of demonstrative pronouns with each type having a singular and a plural form (excluding *go*, *mo*, *fa* and *kwa*). Table 6.8 has all the gory details.

Table 6.8: The secret lives of Demonstrative Pronouns.

	1st sing	1st plu	2nd sing	2nd plu	3rd sing	3rd plu	4th sing	4th plu
1.a	yo/o	ba	yono	bano	yoo	bao	yole	bale
1.b	bo		bono		boo		bole	
2.	o	e	ono	eno	oo	eo	ole	ele
3.	le	a	leno	ano	leo	ao	lele	ale
4.	se	tse	seno	tseo	seo	tseo	sele	tsele
5.	e	tse	eno	tseo	eo	tseo	ele	tsele
6.	lo	tse	lono	tseo	loo	tseo	lole	tsele
7.	bo	a	bono	mono	boo	ao	bole	ale
8.	go		gono		goo		gole	
9.	mo		mono		moo		mole	
	go		gono		goo		gole	
	fa		fano		fao		fale	
	kwa		kwano		kwao		kwale	

A few explanations are in order for Table 6.8. To wit:

1. The first type translates to “this” and “these” in English. It is used for things closest to the speaker.

Noun + concord (except tse & yo):

Ke batla thipa e = I want this knife

Re bala dibuka tse = We read these books

Ke kopa setilo se = I would like this chair

O ruta bana ba = You teach these children

The demonstrative pronoun comes after the noun at the end of the sentence, to avoid confusion with object pronouns (which come before the verb). Sometimes you need to add *mo* as a connector when using the infinitive noun class.

Go apaya go monate = The cooking is nice
Go apaya mo go monate go kae? = Where is the nice cooking

2. The second type translates to “this” (or “these”) nearest you and me and is used less often than the other demonstrative pronouns.

Noun + concord + -no (except tse & yo):

Re tla tlatlela dipudi tseno = We will herd these goats near to us

Re nwa bojalwa bono = We drink this beer next to us

Tla kwano = Come here (between us)

3. The third type translates as that or those and is used for things at intermediate distance from the speaker. These first three types all imply that the object being referred to is within touching range. Both the demonstrative pronouns ending in *o* are usually used to signify a comparison with something else closer to the speaker.

Noun + concord + -o (except tse & yo):

Ke rekile setilo seo = I bought that chair

Le rata bana bao = They like those children

O itse motse oo = I know that village

4. The fourth type translates roughly as that (and those) things out yonder and is used to indicate things at a distance from the speaker. (This can be highly variable, however, I use it for things in America while other people use it for things on the other side of the village). Hand gestures are often helpful.

Noun + concord + -le (except tse & yo):

Ke ya tropong ele = I go to that town yonder

O tswa kwa lefatse lele = You are from that country yonder

Ke palamile dithaba tsele = I climbed those mountains yonder

For more examples see *First Steps in Spoken Setswana* p. 54. Those extra pronouns at the bottom of the chart (go, mo, fa and kwa) are part of the locative noun class. They are dealt with in their own section.

6.23 Absolute (Emphatic) Pronouns

These were already discussed briefly in the introductory chapters, and they are laid out for you in Table 6.9. The absolute pronoun is used to show contrast or emphasis. It may be used with or without subject and object nouns. The contrast/emphasis given is similar to that done by intonation in English e.g. stressing a particular syllable or word, “I want that one.” Each noun class two absolute pronouns (singular and plural) formed by:

Concord + -o + -ne (vowel elision occurs):

ba + o + ne = bone

tse + o + ne = tsone

Noun Class	Singular	Plural
1st Person	nna	rona
2nd Person	wena	lona/lena
3rd Person/ Class 1	ene/yone	bone
Class 2	one/wone	yone
Class 3	lone/jone	one
Class 4	sone	tsone
Class 5	yone	tsone
Class 6	lone	tsone
Class 7	bone/jone	one
Class 8	gone	

Table 6.9: Absolut Pronoun.

Note: in some places the ending of the pronoun changes from *-ne* to *-na*. Check your local dialect to see which is used.

A couple notes on usage. The Absolute Pronoun can be used in place of the Object pronoun:

Subject + concord + verb + absolute pronoun:

O bona ene = He sees him

Ke batla wena = I want you

Ke badile tsone = I read them (the books)

Also, the Absolute Pronoun can be used together with the subject concord to add emphasis:

Absolute pronoun + concord + verb:

Ene o a bona = He sees

Yone e metona = It is big (plu.)

Yone e monate = It is nice (sing.)

6.24 Structural Clues (& Deverbatives)

By now you’ve seen how knowing the different verb suffixes can expand your vocabulary and let you figure out the meaning of a word by analyzing its structure. Here are a few other tricks:

1. Nouns beginning with *mo-*, *ba-*, and *bo-* are likely **people** nouns (except class 2 and 7 singular). So even if you don’t know the exact meaning of a word like this, you can at least make an educated guess.

Moagi = builder Mokwadi = author

So if you know *mo* = person and *go aga* means “to build” you can probably figure it out. The *mo-* is added to the verb stem (*go aga* minus *go*). Person nouns like this often end in *-i*.

However, it is interesting to note that even though the correct prefixes for a person belonging to a Tswana or Sotho tribe are *mo-* and *ba-*, for anyone belonging to group outside of this, the correct prefixes are *le-* and *ma-*:

leKgoa = white person; maKgoa = white people
leBuru = Afrikaner; maBuru = Afrikaaners

Nouns denoting a language begin with *se-*:

seBuru = language of the maBuru (Boers)
seKgoa = language of the maKgoa (English)
seEsemane = language of the maEsemane (also English)

2. To make a noun from a verb in Setswana, change the ending from *-a* to *-o* and vice versa. When using a verb that starts with a vowel, add *k-* to the beginning.

k + araba = karaba → karabo

Sometimes other changes happen that you’ve already learned about, like *b* → *p*:

botsa → botso → potso

Nouns dealing with states of people often add *bo-* as well:

itumela → itumelo → boitumelo

However, there can be different ways to make the same noun. Consider the different translations of “ability” derived from the verb “to be able:”

kgono (drops go and a → o)
go kgona (the infinitive form of the verb)
bokgoni (adds bo and a → i)

3. To make a noun out of a “Weak adjective” the prefix *bo-* is often used along with the adjective stem (minus the concordial prefix):

bo + *ntle* = *bontle* (beauty)

These nouns and adjectives derived from verbs are often called Deverbatives.

4. There are a lot of borrowed words from English in Setswana. If you don’t know how to say what you want in the local language, you can always “Tswanify” the English word and hope it works.

To “Tswanify” a noun, leave it as is in the singular and in the plural add *di-* in front, regardless if it is plural or not in English

Ke a sitwa. Ga ke na diblankets di dintse = I’m cold. I don’t have enough blankets (*dikobo*).

For Person nouns, add *ma-* to make plural instead of *di-*:

matichere = teachers

magents = guys

For verbs, just add *a* to the end of the word if it ends in a consonant, or change the ending vowel to *a*. In the past tense *-a* turns to *-ile*.

Tlhapi e a swimma = The fish swims.

Tlhapi e swimmile = The fish swam.

Sure these may seem a bit crude, but using these has helped me understand more Setswana than I otherwise could and make more people understand me than would have before. And you will be surprised how much English (or Afrikaans, especially in the Northern Cape) has pervaded some people’s Setswana.

6.25 Dialectical Variations

Here are just a few of the common differences in pronunciation that vary in Setswana according to the region and dialect:

F → **H**

Lofeelo → *Loheelo*

Fa → *Ha*

Feditse → *Heditse*

F → **G** (Hard H)

Dirafala → *Diragala*

S → **Š** (Sh)

Suta → Šuta (Shuta)

Mosimane → Mošimane (Moshimane)

These are some of the most prominent, but there certainly are more. Also note that the conjugation and formation of certain verb tenses (especially the Future Negative Tense) will be different in different places and among different people. See the appropriate section to find alternatives.

6.26 Comparison and Contrast

The following verbs can help in making comparisons.

Go tshwana (to look like, look the same as):

Ditlhako di a tshwana = Then shoes look the same

Bontle o tshwana le Dineo = Bontle looks the same as Dineo

Moseseo tshwana le mosese ole = The dress looks the same as that dress

Go lekana (to look the same size or age as):

Basimane ba a lekana = The boys look the same age

Legapu le lekana le legapu lele = The watermelon looks the same size as that watermelon

Go farologanye (to look different than):

Basimane ba farologanye = The boys are different

Dikgomo tsa gagwe di farologanye le tsa me = His cows are different than mine

These verbs are normally used in the present tense and are followed by *le* when a comparison is made between two specific things. Comparisons may also be made using *jaaka* (like, as), *kana* (as much as) and *-sele* (different):

Bontle o tsamaya jaaka Dineo = Bontle walks like Dineo

AJ o bua Setswana jaaka motswana = AJ speaks Setswana like a local

O na le madi kana nna = You have as much money as me

Ba batla go reka pitse e sele = They want to buy a different horse

Ben o ya go apara borukhu bo bosele = Ben is going to put on different pants

For more on the adjectival suffix *-sele* consult the noun class master chart.

6.27 Superlatives

Comparison between descriptive characteristics is done using *go feta* (to surpass) or *go gaisa* (to exceed or excel):

n Mosimane o moleele go feta mosetsana = The boy is taller than the girl

Setswana sa ga AJ se feta Setswana same = AJ's Setswana is better than mine

Lorato o montle go gaisa Bontle = Lorato is more beautiful than Bontle

Note that when comparing physical characteristics both verbs stay in their infinitive form, but for other characteristics they can be conjugated as normal.

The Superlative degree of the adjective equivalent of expressions with “-est” in English (biggest, smallest, etc) does not really exist in Setswana but can be implied by saying “more than all others” using *go feta* (*batho botlhe*) or by repeating the adjective stem:

Tom o moleele-leele = Tom is very tall (the tallest)

Thuto o mokhuthswakhuthswane = Thuto is very short (the shortest)
Mamogolo o mogolo-golo = The old woman is really old

Ke botlhale thata-thata = I am wicked smart

The translations above are just to give you an idea. Another way to express the Superlative is, ironically, with the Diminutive.

Adjective + diminutive:

Mosimane o motelelenyana = The boy is taller

Mosadi o mokimanyana = The woman is fatter

Another way to make “-est” is to add *thata*:

Adjective + diminutive + thata:

Mosimane o motelelenyana thata = The boy is the tallest

Mosadi o mokimanyana thata = The woman is the fattest

6.28 Dependent Clauses

These are compound sentences in which one clause (or part) can happen only if the other part happens. In English these often take the form of “if/then” sentences (“If I get money, then I will buy some piglets”). In Setswana these are often set off by a conjunction and will usually include the future, potential,

subjunctive or conditional tense. “If” can be translated to *ga*, *fa*, or *ha* depending on location. (In spoken Setswana these may be indistinguishable owing to the accent.)

Like in English, each clause could be a sentence on its own (with its own subject, concord and verb). The *if* can act as a conjunction, linking the two clauses together:

Nka apaya ga o ka mpha dijo = I can cook if you give me food

Nka ya šopong ga o ka mpha madi = I can go to the shop if you give me money

Nka go etela ga pula e sa ne = I can visit you if it’s not still raining

The order can also be reversed, with the “if” beginning the sentence and both clauses following it. The comma is optional.

Ga o ka mpha dijo, nka apaya = If you give me food I can cook
Ga o ka mpha madi, nka ya šopong = If you give me money I can go to the shop

Ga pula e sa ne, nka go etela = If it’s not still raining I can visit you

Sometimes instead of the potential mood, dependent clauses can be used with just the simple present tense and the imperative.

Fa a lela o mo fe masi = If he cries, give him milk (the baby)

Fa lo sa tlhaloganye, mpotsa dipotso = If you all don’t understand, ask me questions

The future tense can also be used:

Fa o ya Kuruman, ke tla tsamaya le wena = If you go to Kuruman
I will go with you

Another trigger of Dependent Clauses is *rather* (I’d rather die than eat *mala mogodu*). When using it, the verb directly after changes its ending to *e*. *Rather* (than) can be translated to *gona le gore*. For example:

Gona le gore ke go fe dijo, nka go ruta go apaya = Rather than give you food, I can teach you how to cook

Gona le gore ke swe, nka ja mala mogodu = Rather than die, I would eat mala mogodu.

Like *ga* this can also be used in between the two clauses as a conjunction:

Nka go ruta go apaya, gona le gore ke go fe dijo = I will teach you how to cook rather than give you food

Nka tshoga gona le gore ke swe = I would be afraid rather than die

Nka reka pitsi gona le gore ke reke koloi = I would buy a horse rather than buy a car

Usually the clause not followed by *gona le gore* is in the potential mood.

6.29 Go, Mo-, Fa-, Go- & Kwa- Noun Classes

These are the last noun classes on most charts, and show the adverbial use of nouns. *Go* (noun class 8) has to do with using the infinitive of verbs to make nouns. *Mo-*, *Fa-*, *Go-* and *Kwa-* (noun class 9) are used for locative words and expressions. Before in the packet we talked about changing verbs to nouns (final *a* → *o*). This is another way to do it.

Go ima ga baša = teenage pregnancy

Here *go ima* is being used as a noun, with *ga* as the possessive and *baša* is the object being possessed (lit. to be pregnant of the youth).

This noun class can be used just like the other noun classes (see bottom row of noun class chart in the second appendix). It also has a plural form:

Go lema = Ploughing

Bolemo = Ploughings

Go can also be used for impersonal statements, where the subject is not mentioned but rather is inquired about or implied

Go fithla pitse = There came a horse

Go diragetseng? = What happened?

Go diragalang? = What's happening? (now)

Mo-, *Fa-*, *Go-* and *Kwa-* are used as locative words. The prefix *Go-* is different than the word *Go* used above. These are similar but not equivalent to prepositions. They have no singular or plural forms, but accompany prepositions like under, over, above, below, etc.

Ke beile buka mo godimo ga tafole = I put the book on top of the table

Mo in this case refers to on and *godimo* means above. It is linked to *tafole* by the possessive *ga*:

Neo o rekile kobo mono = Neo bought the blanket here (in this area)

Neo o rekile kobo fa = Neo bought the blanket (at this specific place)

Neo o rekile kobo mo motseng = Neo bought the blanket in this village

The *mo* in this case is used before the locative expression with *-ng*

Ba gorogile mono = They arrived here (in this general area)

Ke nna teng = I stay there

Dikgomo di mo gare ga tsela = The cows are in the middle of the road

Dipadi di fula fa thoko ga setlhare = The goats graze beside the tree

Modise o robala fa tlase ga setlhare = Modise sleeps under the tree

Ba bereka fa gaufi le sepetela = They work near the hospital

Re bona nonyane mo godimo ga setlhare = We see the bird on top of the tree

Ba tsere dilo tsa bone fa fatshe = They took their things from the ground

Basimane ba tshameka kwantle = The boys play outside

The prefixes can also be used just the other noun classes. This is especially true when dealing with the Relative (Demonstrative) Pronouns:

Ema fale = Stand over there (lit: Stand far away here)

Tla kwano = Come here (lit: Come here between you and me)

Ba gorogile moo = They arrived there (lit: They arrived here over there)

Remember that many locative words need ga or le to connect them to the place that follows.

Ke nna kgakala le toropo = I live a long ways from town

Neo o nna fa pele ga banka = Neo lives in front of the bank

6.30 The “Extra” Noun Classes

In deep Setswana, there are actually 11 noun classes. You’ve seen the 8th and 9th mentioned before already. The 10th and 11th aren’t really that important or necessary to know, but I thought they should have a place here See Table 6.10 for the details.

Noun Class	Sample Noun		Prefix		Concord	
	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.	sing.	plu.
10	mooka	maoka	mo	ba	o	ba
11	ntshe	bontshe	-	bo	e	bo

Table 6.10: The legendary tenth and eleventh noun classes.

Class 10 is a small class that mainly contains the names of trees. A large number of trees of the same kind is indicated by changing *mo-* to *lo-*:

Mooka → Looka = a thicket of mimosa trees

Class 11 is also a small class used for the names of animals. A lot of animals of the same kind can be indicated by changing the prefix to *ma-*

Nku → Manku = very many sheep

Podi → Mapudi = very many goats

These are alternatives to using the normal plurals of their respective noun classes. People will understand *dipodi* and *dinku* but may use the above themselves.

As a final note on nouns and their classes, a very small number of nouns actually have two classes (ask the language gods why). Thus the Setswana word for year, *ngwaga*, is actually part of noun class 5 and 1B.

Ngwaga/Dingwaga - Class 5

Ngwaga/Bongwaga - Class 1B

So when you say “Happy new year” you say “*Ngwaga o mošwa*” instead of “*Ngwaga e šwa*”.

6.31 Language End Notes

This is as much Setswana grammar as we know, which is probably more than you will need to learn, and more even than a lot of native speakers. I started writing this as a training manual, and it became an exercise (and nearly an obsession) in the documentation and preservation of Setswana as a distinct and important language. Languages can and do die (just ask the San), or become diluted to the point of pidgin. It is my wish that future generations of Batswana will take their language more seriously, both academically and in its everyday use, and also that future generations of white South Africans will take an interest in learning a Bantu language. Hopefully this manual can go a little way towards realizing those two lofty desires.

As has been said before, this manual is woefully incomplete in many aspects and all efforts at editing, correcting or updating are most welcome. People too numerous to mention here have helped me in invaluable ways to compile it. And while their contributions are well in evidence, all errors are solely my own. Setswana, like all languages, is in a state of constant change, for better or worse. No static pile of papers can ever do justice to that. In this way then, the manual is a permanent work in progress. Hopefully future volunteers, counterparts and PC staff will continue to contribute to improving this humble linguistic endeavor.

Appendix A

Colloquialisms, Proverbs, and Slang

These are just some things we thought you'd like to know. Knowing the colloquialisms will help you understand more informal Setswana, and maybe more importantly keep you from saying something stupid or potentially obscene. Plus using them is a good way to show off.

A.1 Colloquialisms

The many uses of go ja.

1. To eat:

Ke ja dijo = I eat food (this is the basic use of “go ja”)

2. To visit, with nala (ja nala/jela nala):

Re tla go jela nala = We will visit you

3. To spend money:

Ke jele madi a mantsi ko toropong = I spent a lot of money in town

4. To spend time:

O jele jang weekend? = How did you spend your weekend?

5. To use (consume):

Laptop ya gago e ja motlakase thata = Your laptop uses a lot of electricity

6. To corrode or rust:

Parafine e jele sekhaptin = The kerosene corroded the tupperware

7. To be happy (with monate):

Ke ja monate = I am happy

8. To have sex, with direct object (usually a person)

Morago ga basimane ba ja, basetsana ba tla tlhantswa = After the boys eat, the girls will wash

Morago ga basimane ba ja basetsana, ba tla tlhastwa = After the boys have sex with the girls, they will wash

My LCF used this to explain the importance of punctuation. With a comma after *ja* the sentence reads as normal (I know it's sexist but you never met my LCF.) If you place the comma after *basetsana* it means something very different.

More colloquialisms:

Fa koko e sena go tlhoga meno

Lit: when chickens grow teeth

Use: when pigs fly, for something that will never happen

Kamoso le kamoso or *nako le nako*

Lit.: "tomorrow and tomorrow" or "time and time"n

Use: "from now on" or "time and again"

O tagilwe

Lit.: you are intoxicated

Use: you're drunk, can be used jokingly

O tlhapetswe

Lit.: you've been washed

Use: you're drunk (disrespectful, only use with close friends)

Ko morago

Lit.: at the back

Use: used as an alternative to *tsena* meaning "enter" and can mean to use the back door or simply to come in whatever entrance you are at. Can be used even if no back door is present. Used as a response to *koko*.

Maru a thibile

Lit.: the clouds have blocked out the sky.

Use: can be used literally on a cloudy day or figuratively to mean, "trouble is coming" or "danger is brewing."

Go ntse jalo

Lit: to be like that

Use: it is fine/alright

O opile kgomo lonaka

Lit: you beat the cow horn

Use: you're right/correct

Ga ke na sepe

Lit: I have nothing

Use: I don't care/It's not important

Go tlhaba kolobe

Lit: to slaughter the pig

Use: to play hookey, to use an excuse to skip or cut class

Go lofa leso

Lit: to break the spoon

Use: to be absent

A.2 Proverbs

Nko ya kgomo mogala tshwara thata esere go utlwa sebody wa kgaoga ibile mosima o tseneng kgomo ga o rarwe ka bobi

Lit: the cow rope catches...

Use: catch hold of what is important and don't let go

Korwe ga ke je ke bapalela tsetsi

Lit: the hornbill gathers food for its young. The hornbill is a bird that will starve itself to feed its chicks.

Use: the father of the family doesn't eat until the children eat

Ga gona kgomo ya boroko

Lit: cow of (something)

Use: if you don't work you don't get anything

Gaa bo motho go thebe phatshwa

Lit: regardless of the condition of your house, it will always be your home

Use: home is where the heart is

Motho ga a itsiwe ese naga

Lit: a person is not known like the wilderness

Use: you can't trust people because you don't really know them

Ba epela selepe

Lit: to bury the hatchet

Use: to get over something, make peace

A pitsa e a tle e tshege momitshara e re, "O montsho?"

Lit: Does the pot laugh at the lid saying, "You are black?"

Use: Does the pot call the kettle black

(Editor's Note: The above version, I'm guessing, is more common in the area the LCF making the corrections is from. Art had a different version: "A

ngwedi o a tla a tshege letsatsi a re, 'O mosweu?' Literally, "Does the moon laugh at the sun saying, 'You are white?' ")

Go aramela letsatsi le tlhabile

Lit: to bask in the sun while it shining

Use: get it while the getting's good

Boferefere ga se papadi

Lit: chicanery is not business

Use: cheaters never prosper

Dikeledi tsa mathe

Lit: tears of spittle

Use: crocodile tears

Dipitse tse di tiludi di bonwa ka mmala

Lit: zebras as recognized by their spots

Use: a leopard can't change its spots

Di sela mmapa ga di ratane

Lit: they who gather wild berries side by side don't love each other

Use: Familiarity breeds contempt

Ditsa bana ba mpa ga di tsenwe

Lit: affairs of the family are not to be entered into (by strangers)

Use: Let other people's quarrels alone

E a re motho a re di a sisa, a bo a bone ka tsa ga gabo

Lit: When a man speaks of rich milkers, depend upon it he means his own goats

Use: all his geese are swans

E masi ga e itsale

Use: a good milk cow does not always bear itself (a calf that becomes a good milker)

Lit: good parents don't mean a good offspring

Fifing go tshwaraganelwa dikobo

Lit: in the dark people hold onto one another's blankets

Use: politics (or adversity) makes strange bedfellows

Ga se goo lobelo, ke goo marapo a thata

Lit: What matters is not the race, but strong bones

Use: The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong

Go fa ke go ipeela

Lit: To give away is to put away yourself

Use: One good turn deserves another

Go lala ka lobadi

Lit: to sleep over a wound
 Use: forgive and forget, sleep on it first

Go lepa go a dia
 Lit: long observation wastes time
 Use: don't procrastinate, he who hesitates is lost

Go swa motho, go sale motho
 Lit: when a man dies, the man remains
 Use: the body dies, the soul remains

Khudu ya mariga e itsiwe ke mmei
 Lit: where the winter tortoise is, is known only to him who placed it there
 Use: A secret between more than two is no more a secret

Lefufa le apeetswe le letlapa, letlapa la butswa ga sa ala lefufa
 Lit: Jealousy was boiled in the same pot as a stone, the stone got soft but jealousy remained
 Use: jealousy can never be cured

Lefoko la maabanyane ga le tlhabe kgomo
 Lit: the evening word does not kill a cow
 Use: if wishes were horses, beggars would ride

Leswetsana ga le ke le lela fela, le abo le utlwile a magolo Lit: the young bird doesn't crow until it hears the old ones
 Use: a chip off the old block, like father like son

Maano ga a site, go sita loso
 Lit: there is a plan for everything except death
 Use: death keeps no calendar

Mafoko ga a lale nageng
 Lit: news doesn't spend the night in the wilderness
 Use: Bad news travels fast

Mao lo lo ntlha-pedi lo tlhaba kobo le moroki
 Lit: the double pointed awl pricks both the clothe and the finger
 Use: double edged sword, cuts both ways

Mmangwana ke yo o tshwarang thipa ka bogale
 Lit: it's the mother who catches the knife
 Use: mothers are more vulnerable than their husbands

Moipolai ga a lelelwe
 Lit: suicides are not cried over
 Use: he who cuts himself willingly deserves no salve

Moste o lapeng
 Lit: the real home is the courtyard (women's quarters)

Use: the hand that rocks the cradle (a woman's) rules the world

Ngwana yo o sa utlweng molao wa (ga rragwe)/(ba tsadi) o tla utlwa molao wa manong

Lit: the child who doesn't know the law of his father/parents will know the law of the eagles

Use: spare the rod and spoil the child, said often to naughty children

O dule ka soba la mogodu

Lit: he escaped through a hole in the stomach

Use: he escaped by the skin of his teeth

O itsetse fela jaaka peba

Lit: He has begotten himself just like a mouse

Use: like father, like son

O matlho mantsi

Lit: he has many eyes

Use: he's a "player"

O ruta tshwene mapalamo

Lit: You are teaching the baboon to climb

Use: you are doing useless things, preaching to the choir

O se sugele ngwana thari a sale mpen

Lit: don't soften a *thari* (carrying sling) for an unborn child

Use: don't count your chickens before they hatch

O upa maraka tau e setse e tlhasetse

Lit: he puts a protection spell on his cattle post after the lion has attacked

Use: like shutting the door only after the thief has stolen everything

Bala gabedi e sita bala gangwe

Lit: counting twice is better than counting once

Use: better double-check it; measure twice, cut once

Poo ga di pedi tlhakanela lesaka

Lit: two bulls never share the same kraal

Use: a man cannot serve two masters

Phono-kgolo ga e tswe ka ngwana wa motho

Lit: a great scandal doesn't pass through a respectable man's child

Use: like father, like son

Sedibana se pele ga se ikangwe

Lit: the well ahead is not to be trusted

Use: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush

Se ileng se abo se ile, lesilo ke mo se latedi

Lit: what's gone is gone, he who pursues it is a fool

Use: don't cry over spilled milk

Se tshege yo o oleng, mareledi a sale pele

Lit: don't laugh at the fallen, there may be slippery places ahead

Use: people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones

Phokoje o rile ke lobelo, marota a re ke namile

Lit: the little wolf said I am swift, but the hilly country said I am wide

Use: big fish in a small pond

Tsela kgopo ga e letse nageng

Lit: the longest way does not cause one to spend the night in the wilderness

Use: there are no shortcuts

Matlho a motho ga se ntša

Lit: the eyes of a person are not a dog's

Use: you just can't eat in front of a person (without sharing food) like you can a dog

Motho ke motho ka batho ba bangwe

Lit: a person is a person with other people

Use: the Setswana translation of the philosophy of Ubuntu

Ga go na mosi ntle molelo

Lit: there is no smoke outside fire

Use: where there is smoke there is fire

A.3 Interesting Language Facts

Simba, the name of a popular snack food brand, means lion in Swahili. But in Zulu it means poop.

The name of Gauteng province means "place of gold" in Setswana and Sesotho. The local name for Johannesburg is eGoli, a Zulu word that also means "place of gold."

Lucas Mongope, the former "president" of the Bophutatswana homeland, took the title of Tautona upon becoming leader. It means "the big lion."

Similarly in Zulu, when greating the king, you should say *Bayeda. Wena wendlovu*. It means, "Greetings. You are the elephant."

A strange amount of Spanish has infiltrated popular Tsotsitaal. Some examples are *hola* (heita hola), *poco* (meaning little or few) and *viva* (meaning long live).

The Setswana alphabet contains all the same click sounds as the Nguni languages (c, q, and x) but they are very rarely used.

In the big Setswana dictionary, *laba* is a word that means "to pick something out of the eye with the tongue." I have never heard it spoken in conversation.

There are around 3 million Setswana speakers in South Africa, even more than in the country of Botswana. It ranks as the 5th largest Bantu language in South Africa in terms of the number of “native” speakers.

In addition to the 11 official South African languages, other languages spoken in country are !Xun and Khwe (both San dialects), Nama, Pondo, Shona (the national language of Zimbabwe), Hindi, Urdu, Bangla, Tsotsitaal, Fanakalo and of course American.

Afrikaans was not considered a proper language until the 1920’s. Before that linguists regarded it as a pidgin dialect of Dutch. Some of the earliest written evidence of Afrikaans as a distinct language is a commentary on the Quran written by Indonesian slaves and prisoners using Arabic script.

A.4 Additional Vocabulary

This section is meant to complement the vocabulary you have learned in training and also to give you some words not ordinarily found in dictionaries or polite conversation.

A.4.1 Maadimo a seBuru - Afrikaans

Maadngwa means “borrowed things,” in this case words. I wrote this list mainly for those of us who work in the Northern Cape, or anywhere else where Seburu (Afrikaans) is the dominant second language. As is the case with English, many Afrikaans words have made their way into everyday spoken Setswana. Table A.4.1 gives a few you may encounter (please note that some of this is not “proper” Afrikaans; ask around if you’re interested in the real thing).

vandag - today	bliksem - dammit	vroeg - early
maat - friend	sjambok - whip	slegte - bad
regte good, right	stout - naughty	asseblief - please
passop - be careful	swart - black/bad	niks - nothing
gevaar - danger	fotostat - copy	foetsek - get away!
mooi - good	baie - a lot	askis - excuse me
amper - almost	vartuk - rag/cloth	maklik - easy
rooi - red	dankie - thank you	mense - people
skono - to scrub, clean	skottel - plate	lekker - monate
taal - language	maara - but	tuka - headwrap
craia - bring/take	claar - totally/seriously	skarse - infrequently
plaas - farm	kaas - cheese	mealie - corn
stoep - porch	bikere - cup, mug	skoftin - tupperware

A.4.2 South African English

Even English has developed a little differently down here. It leans more toward the British variety, with loan words from Afrikaans and other African languages as well as holdovers from the old cockney stuff and things that are normally found on the subcontinent. Table A.1 gives a sampling.

Table A.1: South African English.

aerial - antenna	Alright? - Are you OK?
babalaas - a hangover	bakkie - pickup truck
bonnet - car hood	boot - car trunk
bottle store - liquor store	braai - barbeque
biscuit - cookie	burglar bars - security bars for windows, etc
bush - wilderness	bush telegraph - how news travels in the bush
cake - any type of sweet baked good	cancel - delete
capture - enter information into a database, etc	casualty - Emergency Room
Cheers - Thanks	China - any asian person
china - friend	chips - french fries
coffee - 70% real coffee, 30% chicory	cool drink - soda or pop (whichever you prefer)
coolie - derogatory word for Indians/Chinese	crisps - potato chips
diary - datebook, planner	dongle - attachment/adapter (Bluetooth dongle)
dorp - really small town	dumpie - small bottle of beer (usually 330 ml)
dustbin - garbage can	duster - chalkboard eraser
extend - move over/aside	feld - wilderness (veldt)
flat - apartment	globe - light bulb
hectic - crazy, busy, rough, heavy	hire - rent
Howzit? - Hello/How are you?	Izzit? - Is that so? Really?
just now - sometime soon	kraal - corral (for animals)
lapa - outdoor patio covered with thatched roof	lekker - nice, delicious, awesome (monate)
lift - elevator	lorry - big truck, semi truck
mealie - corn	mobile - cell phone
naartjie - tangerine	now now - pretty soon
petrol - gasoline	photostat - photocopy
plaster - band aid	plastic - grocery bag
puncture (a) - a flat, leak	robot - traffic light
rondaval - round hut	rubber - pencil eraser

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rubbish - garbage Shame! - Darn! Oh No! sjambok - whip SMS - text message snap - photo soda - club soda spoor - footprints or tracks stiffy disk - floppy disk stopper - drain plug sweets - candy tarven - tavern, bar tea break - tea time tin - can tomato sauce - ketchup tuck shop - bodega	sellotape - scotch tape sishebo/seshabo - sauce, stew slaughtered - very drunk smart - well dressed snooker - smaller version of billiards spanner - wrench stencil - overhead transparency stoep - porch surgery - doctor's office tap water - regular water, ask for at a restaurant taxi - not just a cab tekkies - tennis shoes tin stuff - canned food torch - flashlight washing powder - detergent

A.5 Swearing

Just so you know. Sadly this is one area where Setswana comes up short with respect to the other Bantu languages. If you really want some good curse words, learn Zulu. The clicking alone makes it sound fiercer, and no one messes with the authors of the *difaqane*. Afrikaans also has some staggeringly vulgar phrases.

Seaka = bitch, whore, prostitute (sometimes spelled *siaka* or *tsiaka*); simplifies the word *Sefebe*, which is a stronger word.

Makaka = crap, shit (this sounds a lot like *makgakga*, which means naughty, but it is different)

Masepa = shit (stronger than *makaka*)

Fok = fuck (from Afrikaans), often heard as “Fok of!”

Sebono = asshole

Voetsek = Get away (commonly used for animals, bad when used for people)

Suka wena = foetsek

Kaffir = nigger

Mogala mmakapa = general curse word (like dammit) or expression of surprise. In some areas, it is used only by people who have been to initiation school.

Mogale = an expression of surprise. *Mogale* is also used to praise someone, usually a person who has stood up for rights, e.g. Nelson Mandela; he is thus called *Mogale* or hero.

Mukta = mogale

Polo = penis (naughty)

Ntsutsu = penis (again naughty)

Bliksem = dammit (Afrikaans all-purpose exclamation.)

Jou ma = your mom (Afrikaans all purpose insult.) ***This can be combined with other phrases as your imagination and vocabulary allows. See below for some ideas. If you are going to learn a bit of Afrikaans, learn the pronunciation. It's rather idiosyncratic but consistent.

Poesneus = cunt nose

Kakhuiskriek = shithouse cricket

Hondenaar = dog fucker

So, for example, we can say *Jou ma is 'n fokken donkenaar* = your mother is a fucking donkey fucker***

Ma se poes = your mom's cunt

A.6 HIV Vocabulary

This is a list of different vocabulary used when talking about HIV and AIDS, reproductive health or even biology. Slang terms are noted where used.

Thobalano = sex

Ditshwang = the place of female genitalia (covers the whole area)

Senana = vagina/mons pubis (lit. "the baby thing")

Nnyo = vagina

Nnywana = vagina

Nawa = clitoris (lit. bean)

Sebete = clitoris

Letsela/Matsele = breast/breasts (high toned - low toned means sorghum)

Tlhoko = nipple

Go jola = to have casual sex/hook up/have an affair (slang)

Go robalana = sleep around (lit. to sleep with each other)

Nyatsi = lover (usually that you have an affair with)/concubine

Kausu/Dikausu = condoms (slang - lit. socks)

Lepele = penis (sometimes just *pele*, also *marel* and *tril* in slang)

Sebono = anus (there is no difference in Setswana between asshole and anus)

Go tlhatswa = to be on your period, menstruating (figurative - lit. to wash)

Kgwedi = menstruation (lit.); *O mo kgweding* = She is menstruating.

Go suna fela = dry (“vanilla”) kissing

Go suna ka loleme = tongue (“French”) kissing

Ponyo ponyo = masturbation

Here are some more clinical and technical phrases that might come in handy for HIV workshops and the like.

Vaginal intercourse without a condom = *Tlhakanelo dikobo le mosadi go sena kausu/mosomelwana*

Anal intercourse without a condom = *Matenyola go sena kausu/mosomelwana*

Oral sex without protection = *Go suna bosadi/bonna go sena tshireletso*

Unprotected sex with multiple partners = *Thobalano le batho ba bantse*

Sharing razors used in traditional healing practices = *Go dirisa magare mo bongakeng ba setšo*

Vaginal intercourse with a condom = *Tlhakanelo dikobo le mosadi go na le kausu/mosomelwana*

Anal intercourse with a condom = *Matanyula ka kausu/mosomelwana*

Oral sex with protection = *Go suna bosadi/bonna go sena tshireletso*

Sharing razors that have been properly disinfected between uses = *Go dirisa di magare a a tlhatswitsweng*

Having unprotected sex with one, negative faithful partner = *Go robala le motho a le mongwe a se matlho matlho*

Prevent = *Thibela*

Exposure to mosquito = *Monang*

Eating leftover food from someone with HIV = *Go ja masalela a dijo go tswa mo mothong yo o nang le tshwaetso ya HIV.*

Sharing a drinking cup or utensils with an HIV-positive person = *Go dirisa kopi (ya ya go nwa kgotsa sejana se le sengwe le motho yo o nang le tswaetso kgotsa mogare wa HIV)/(kana sejana)*

Appendix B

General Grammar and Verb Reference

B.1 Tense formulation reference

First, we start with a nearly comprehensive list of all the grammar formulas we've seen thus far.

Present Positive Tense

Subject + concord + verb + object

“Long” Present Positive Tense

Subject + concord + a + verb

Present Negative Tense

Subject + ga + concord + verb (-e)

Past Positive Tense

Subject + concord + verb (-ile, etc)

Past Negative Tense

Subject + ga + concord + a + verb

Future Positive Tense

Subject + concord + tla + verb

Future Negative Tense (most common)

1. **Subject + participial + ka se + verb (-e)**
2. **Subject + concord + kitla + participial + verb**

Potential Positive Mood

Subject + concord + ka + verb

Potential Negative Mood

Subject + concord + ka se + verb (-e)

Past Continuous Positive Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + verb

Past Continuous Negative Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + sa + verb (-e)

Past Definite (Narrative) Positive Tense

Subject + concord + ne + modified concord + verb

Past Definite (Narrative) Negative Tense

Subject + concord + ne + modified concord + se ka + modified concord + verb

Past Perfect Positive Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + verb (-ile, etc)

Past Perfect Negative Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + sa + verb (-e)

Future Perfect/Continuous Positive Tense

Subject + concord + tla bo/be + participial + verb (-ile, etc)

Future Perfect/Continuous Negative Tense

Subject + concord + kitla + participial + verb

Subjunctive Positive Mood

Subject + concord + verb (-e)

Subjunctive Negative Mood

Subject + concord + se + verb (-e)

Polite Imperative Positive Mood

Subject + concord + ke/ko + participial + verb (-e)

Polite Imperative Negative Mood

Subject + concord + ke/ko + participial + se + verb (-e)

Dependent Negative Future Tense

Subject + concord + ke/ko + modified concord + verb

Optative Positive Mood

Subject + concord + bo/be + participial + verb

Optative Negative Mood

Subject + participial + bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e)

Conditional Present Positive Mood

Subject + concord + ka + bo/be + participial + verb

Conditional Present Negative Mood

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e)

Conditional Past Positive Mood

1. **Subject + concord + ne + participial + ka + bo/be + concord + verb**
2. **Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + verb**

Conditional Past Negative Mood

Subject + concord + ne + participial + ka bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e)

Dependent Conditional Positive Mood

1. **Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + verb (-ile, etc)**
2. **Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + verb**
3. **Subject + concord + ne + participial + tla + concord + verb**

Dependent Conditional Negative Mood

1. **Subject + concord + ne + participial + ka bo/be + participial + sa + verb (-e)**
2. **Ga + subject + concord + ne + participial + kitla + concord + verb**

Conditional Past Perfect Positive Tense

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + verb (-ile, etc)

Conditional Past Perfect Negative Tense

Subject + concord + ka bo/be + participial + ne + participial + sa + verb

Hortative Positive Mood

Verb stem + tle

Hortative Negative Mood

Se + verb (-e) + tle

Imperative Positive Mood

Verb stem + object

Imperative Negative Mood

Concord + seka + modified concord + verb

Habitual Positive Mood

Subject + concord + tle + participial + verb (-e)

Habitual Negative Mood

Subject + ga + concord + ke + participial + verb

Consecutive Positive Mood

Subject + concord + verb 1 (past tense) + concord + bo/be + participial + verb 2

Future in the Past Positive Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + tla bo/be + concord + verb

Future in the Past Negative Tense

Subject + concord + ne + participial + se + kitla + participial + verb

B.2 Verb Conjugations

Table B.1: Verb conjugations galore.

Positive	Negative
<i>Present:</i>	
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Positive	Negative
Ke reka dijo	Ga ke reke dijo
O reka dijo	Ga a reke dijo
Ó reka dijo	Ga á reke dijo
Le reka dijo	Ga le reke dijo
Ba reka dijo	Ga ba reke dijo
<i>Long Present (w/o Direct Object):</i>	
Ke a reka	Ga ke reke
O a (wa) reka	Ga a reke
Ó a (wa) reka	Ga á reke
Re a reka	Ga re reke
Le a reka	Ga le reke
Ba a reka	Ga ba reke
<i>Past/Perfect:</i>	
Ke rekile dijo	Ga ke a reka dijo
O rekile dijo	Ga a a reka dijo
Ó rekile dijo	Ga á a reka dijo
Re rekile dijo	Ga re a reka dijo
Le rekile dijo	Ga le a reka dijo
Ba rekile dijo	Ga ba a reka dijo
<i>Future*:</i>	
Ke tla reka dijo	Ga nkitla ke reka dijo
O tla reka dijo	Ga o kitla o reka dijo
tla reka dijo	Ga á kitla a reka dijo
Re tla reka dijo	Ga re kitla re reka dijo
Le tla reka dijo	Ga le kitla le reka dijo
Bat la reka dijo	Ga ba kitla ba reka dijo
<i>Potential:</i>	
Nka (Ke ka) reka dijo	Nka (Ke ka) se reke dijo
O ka reka dijo	O ka se reke dijo
ka reka dijo	Ó ka se reke dijo
Re ka reka dijo	Re ka se reke dijo
Le ka reka dijo	Le ka se reke dijo
Ba ka reka dijo	Ba ka se reke dijo
<i>Past continuous:</i>	
Ke ne ke reka dijo	Ke ne ke sa reka dijo
O ne o reka dijo	O ne o sa reka dijo
ne a reka dijo	Ó ne a sa reka dijo
Re ne re reka dijo	Re ne re sa reka dijo
Le ne le reka dijo	Le ne le sa reka dijo
Ba ne ba reka dijo	Ba ne ba sa reka dijo
<i>Past definite:</i>	
Ke ne ka reka dijo	Ke ne ka seka ka reka dijo
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Positive	Negative
O ne wa reka dijo Ó ne a reka dijo Re ne ra reka dijo Le ne lwa reka dijo Ba ne ba reka dijo	O ne wa seka wa reka dijo Ó ne a seka a reka dijo Re ne ra seka ra reka dijo Le ne lwa seka lwa reka dijo Ba ne ba seka ba reka dijo
<i>Narrative subtense:</i>	
Ka reka dijo Wa reka dijo Á reka dijo Ra reka dijo Lwa reka dijo Ba reka dijo	Ga ka reka dijo Ga wa reka dijo Ga á reka dijo Ga ra a reka dijo Ga lwa reka dijo Ga ba reka dijo
<i>Imperative:</i>	
Reka dijo Rekang dijo	O seka wa reka dijo (O ska reka) Lo seka was reka dijo (Le ska reka)
<i>Optative:</i>	
Ke be ke reka dijo O be o reka dijo Ó be a reka dijo Re be re reka dijo Le be le reka dijo Ba be ba reka dijo	Ke be ke sa reka dijo O be o sa reka dijo Ó be o sa reka dijo Re be re sa reka dijo Le be le sa reka dijo Ba be ba sa reka dijo
<i>Future progressive:</i>	
Ke tla be ke reka dijo O tla be o reka dijo Ó tla be a reka dijo Re tla be re reka dijo Le tla be le reka dijo Ba tla be ba reka dijo	Ke tla be ke sa reka dijo O tla be o sa reka dijo Ó tla be a sa reka dijo Re tla be re sa reka dijo Le tla be le sa reka dijo Ba tla be ba sa reka dijo
<i>Conditional:</i>	
Nka (Ke ka) bo ke reka dijo O ka bo o reka dijo Ó ka bo a reka dijo Re ka bo re reka dijo Le ka bo le reka dijo Ba ka bo ba reka dijo	Nka bo ke sa reke dijo O ka bo o sa reke dijo Ó ka bo a sa reke dijo Re ka bo re sa reke dijo Le ka bo le sa reke dijo Ba ka bo ba sa reke dijo
<i>Past perfect:</i>	
Ke ne ke rekile dijo O ne o rekile dijo Ó ne a rekile dijo Re ne re rekile dijo Le ne le rekile dijo	Ke ne ke sa reka dijo O ne o sa reka dijo Ó ne a sa reka dijo Re ne re sa reka dijo Le ne le sa reka dijo
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Positive	Negative
Ba ne ba rekile dijo	Ba ne ba sa reka dijo
<i>Future Perfect:</i>	
Ke tla bo ke rekile dijo	Ga nkitla ke reka dijo
O tla bo o rekile dijo	Ga o kitla a reka dijo
Ó tla bo a rekile dijo	Ga á kitla a reka dijo
Re tla bo re rekile dijo	Ga re kitla re reka dijo
Le tla bo le rekile dijo	Ga le kitla le reka dijo
Ba tla bo ba rekile dijo	Ga ba kitla ba reka dijo
<i>Subjunctive:</i>	
A ke reke dijo	Ke se reke dijo
A o reke dijo	O se reke dijo
A ó reke dijo	Ó se reke dijo
A re reke dijo	Re se reke dijo
A le reke dijo	Le se reke dijo
A ba reke dijo	Ba se reke dijo
<i>Hortative:</i>	
Reka dijo tle	Se reka dijo tle
Rekang dijo tle	Se rekang dijo tle
<i>Habitual:</i>	
Ke a tle ke reke dijo	Ga nké (ke ké) ke reka dijo
O a tle o reke dijo	Ga o ké o reka dijo
Ó a tle a reke dijo	Ga ó ké a reka dijo
Re a tle re reke dijo	Ga re ké re reka dijo
Le a tle le reke dijo	Ga le ké le reka dijo
Ba a tle ba reke dijo	Ga ba ké ba reka dijo

The future positive will sometimes appear as *tlaa* in publications from Botswana. Also, *ke tla* will sometimes be rendered as *ntla*. *Ne* can be replaced with *ile* or *kile* in some dialects.

Other variants can be found in the relevant sections of this book or the appendix of *First Steps in Spoken Setswana*.

B.3 Verb list

Finally, we have a list of basic Setswana verbs with past tense conjugation that should be helpful. I used them for my flash cards. Many you already know. Use this as a guide, adding or amending where necessary.

Table B.2: A verb list for the ages.

able - kgona/kgonne	add - loka/lokile
angry (to be) - kwata/kwatile	annoyed (to be) - tenega/tenegile
answer - araba/arabile	arrive - goroga/gorogile
ask - botsa/boditse	bake - duba/dubile
bathe - tlhapa/tlhapile	be - nna/ntse (nnile)
be able - kgona/kgonne	be from - tswa/dule (tswile)
be happy - itumela/itumetse	beat - betsa/beditse
become - nna/ntse	beg - kopa/kopile
begin - simolola/simolotse	believe - dumela/dumetse
bite - loma/lomile	board - palama/palame
boil - bedisa/bedisitse	boil (2) - bela/betse
borrow - adima/adimile	break - robega/robegile
break (2) - thuba/thubile	bring - tlisa/tlisitse
build - aga/agile	burn - fisa/fisitse
burn (2) - sa/sile	bury - fitlha/fitlhile
buy - reka/rekile	call - bitsa/biditse
carry - tshola/tshotse	catch - tshwara/tswere
change - tshentsha/tshentshile	change (2) - fetoga/fetogile
chew - tshotlha/tshotlhile	choose - tlhaola/tlhaotse
chop - rema/remile	clean - phepafatsa/phepafaditse
climb - palama/palame;	close - tswala/tswetse
namela/nametse	
come - tla/tlile	come (2) - tlaya/tlile
consider - sekaseka/sekasekile	cook - apaya/apeile
cough - gotlholo/gotlhotse	count - bala/badile
cover - khurumela/khurumetse	crash - thula/thutse
cry - lela/ledile	cut - sega/segile
dance - bina/binne	decapitate - kgaola tlhogo
decide - swetsa/sweditse	delay - dia/diile
delete - sutla/sutlile	dig - epa/epile
die - swa/sule	die (2) - tlhokofela/tlhokofetse
do - dira/dirile	drink - nwa/nole/nwele
drop - usa/usitse	dry - phimola/phimotse
early (to be) - phakela/phakeletse	eat - ja/jele
enter - tsena/tsenye	examine - tlhatlhoba/tlhatlhobile
explain - tlhalosa/tlhalositse	fall - wa/wele
fall in love - ratana/ratanye/ratane	fear - tshaba/tshabile
feed - jesa/jesitse	feel - ikutlwa/ikutlwile
fetch - ga/gile	fight - lwa/lole
fill - tlhasa/tletse	find - fitlhela/fitlhetse
finish - fetsa/feditse	fly - fofa/fofile
forget - lebala/lebetse	forgive - itshwarela/itshwaretse

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freeze - gatsela/gatsetse	get - kereya/kereile
get down - fologa/fologile	give - fa/file
give (2) - naya/neile	give back - busa/busitse
go - ya/ile	go away - tsamaya/tsamaile
gossip - seba/sebile	grab - tshwara/tshwere
grill - besa/besitse	grind - sila/sitse
grow - gola/gotse	harvest - roba/robile
have - na le/ne	hear - utlwa/utlwile
help - thusa/thusitse	hide - fitlha/fitlhile
hit - itaya/iteile	hold - tshwara/tshwere
hope - solofela/solofetse	inject - enta/entile
injure - gobega/gobegile	instruct - laya/laile
iron - sola/sotse	itch - baba/babile
jump - tlola/tlotse	keep - boloka/belokile
kick - raga/ragile	kiss - atla/atlile
kiss (2) - suna/sunne	kill - bolaya/bolaile
kind (to be) - siama/siame	knit - loga/logile
knock - kokota/kokotile	know - itse/itsitse
laugh - tshega/tshegile	learn - ithuta/ithutile
lend - adima/adimile	let go - tlogela/tlogeletse
lie (to tell a) - aka/akile	lift - tsholetsa/tshoeditse
lift (2) - kuka/kukile	like - rata/ratile
listen - reetsa/reeditse	live - phela/phedile
live (stay) - nna/ntse	live (stay, 2) - dula/dutse
lock - kopela/kopetse	lock (2) - khiya/khiile
look (for) - senka/senkile	lost (to be) - timela/timeletse
love - rata/ratile	lower - fokotsa/fokoditse
make - dira/dirile	marry (male) - nyala/nyetse
marry (female) - nyalwa/nyetswe	mean - raya/rile; kaya/kaile
move - fuduga/fudugile	move (2) - suta/sutile
need - tlhoka/tlhokile	noise (to make) - rasa/rasitse
noise (to make, 2) - tlhodiya/tlhodile	obtain - bona/bone
open - bula/butse	pass - feta/fetile
pay - patela/patetse; patela/patetse	pay (2) - duela/duetse
pee - rota/rotile	phone - leletsa/leleditse
phone (2) - fonela/fonetse	pick up - pega/pegile
play - tshameka/tshamekile	plough - lema/lemile
pluck - tlhoba/tlhobile	point - supa/supile
pour - tshela/tshetse	pray - rapela/rapetse
prevent - thibela/thibetse	pull - goga/gogile
puncture - phantsha/phantshitse	put - baya/beile
put on - apara/apere	put on (socks, etc) - rwala/rwele
quiet (to be) - didimala/didimetse	raise - tsholetsa/tsholetsitse
read - bala/badile	read (2) - buisa/buisitse
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receive - amogela/amogetse remember - gopola/gopotse rent - hira/hirile rest - ikhutsa/ikhutsitse return (somewhere) - boa/boile run - taboga/tabogile run away (2) - siana/sianye save - boloka/belokile see - bona/bonye/bone sell - rekisa/rekisitse send (2) - roma/romile sew - roka/rokile should - tshwanela/tshwanetse shut - tswala/tswaletse sick (to be, 2) - fokola/fokotse sing - opela/opetse sit (2) - nna fatse/ntse fatse sleep - robala/robetse sow - jala/jadile/jetse spend the day - tlhola/tlhotse sprain - pitsega/pitsegile start - simolola/simolotse steal - utswa/utswitse stiff (to be) - gagamatsa/gagametse stop (to make) - emisa/emisitse study - ithuta/ithutile swollen (to be) - ruruga/rurugile take off - apola/apotse talk - bua/buile teach - ruta/rutile tell - bolelela/boletse think - nagana/naganne tie - bofa/bofile touch - koma/komile travel - tsamaya/tsamaile turn - tshika/tshikile turn on - thuba/thubile understand - tlhalo- ganya/tlhalogantse visit (someone) - etela/etetse	refuse - gana/ganne remove - tlosa/tlositse reply - fetola/fetotse return (something) - busa/busitse rot - boda/bodile run away - sia/siile same (to be the) - tshwana/tshwanile/tshwanne say - re/rile; bua/buile; raya/rile seem - lebega/lebegile send - isa/isitse serve - tshola/tshotse share - kgaoganya/kgaogantse show - bontsha/bontshitse sick (to be) - bobola/bobotse sick (to be, 3) - lwala/lwetse sit - dula/dutse slaughter - tlhaba/tlhabile slice - kgaola/kgaotse; sega/segile speak - bua/buile spend the night - lala/letse stand - ema/eme; emela/emeletse stay behind - sala/setse step on - gata/gatile stir - fudua/fuduile stop - ema/eme struggle - sokola/sokotse sweep - feela/feetse take - tsaya/tsere take off (socks, etc) - rola/rotse taste - utlwa/utlwile (ka molomo) tease - tshwenya/tshwenyile/tshwentse thank - leboga/lebogile think (2) - akanya/akanyitse tired (to be) - lapa/lapile translate - fetolela/fetoletse try - leka/lekile turn off - tima/timetse underline - thala/thaletse use - dirisa/dirisitse visit (someone - 2) - jela nala/jetse nala
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vomit - tlhatsa/tlhatsitse	wake up - tsoga/tsogile
watch - eba/ebile; lebelela/lebeletse	want - batla/batlile
wash - tlhatswa/tlhatswitse	water - nosetsa/noseditse
welcome - amogela/amogetse	work - bereka/berekile; dira/dirile
would like - kopa/kopile	write - kwala/kwadile

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